



SECULARISM, ISLAM
AND MODERNITY

Selected Essays of Alam Khundmiri

Edited with an introduction by

M.T. Ansari



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Contents

Foreword

Kadir Zaman

Introduction: In the Interstices of an Indian Islamic Identity

M.T. Ansari

Perspectives on Islam and Philosophy

Asghar Ali Engineer

PART I

1. A Critical Examination of Islamic Traditionalism with Reference to the Demands of Modernization

2. God—The Contemporary Debate: The Islamic Perspective

3. Some Problems of Inter-religious Understanding

4. Religion and its Application to Modern Life: The Islamic Problem

PART II

5. Man's Nature and Destiny: The Philosophic View in Islam

6. Al-Ghazali's Repudiation of Causality: The Destruction of Philosophical Enquiry in Islam

7. The Meaning of Reason in the Systems of al-Farabi and Ibn Sina

8. Eastern Aristotelians and Time

9. The Tension between Morality and Law in Islam

PART III

10. Iqbal on Human Knowledge

11. Iqbal and Indian Sufism

12. Iqbal on Time and Self

13. Iqbal and the Existentialist Thinkers: Nietzsche, Kierkegaard and

Heidegger

14. The Political Philosophy of Iqbal

PART IV

15. Secularism: Western and Indian

16. Some Distinctive Features of Indian Sufism

17. The Changing Concept of Man in Sufi Literature

18. Islam and Fascism

19. Islam and Democracy.

20. Obscurantism and the Indian Situation (with Special Reference to the
Indian Muslim Community.)

21. Contemporary Religious Situation: An Existential Analysis

Published Works of Alam Khundmiri
Index

Foreword

He performed no miracles, he made no history, yet for many of us he remains no less than a legend. Those who heard him speak in private or in public on any subject were deeply impressed by his scholarship, intellect and zest. Addressing a gathering of learned scholars and religious luminaries he could speak on Sufism for two hours without repeating a single idea. He could also speak with the same ease and finesse on Marxian aesthetics to renowned intellectuals. In both cases the effect was spellbinding.

To some, Alam was a deeply religious person. To some others, he was not at all religious. Founders of religious traditions and philosophers of all periods captivated him; he resonated their ideas with a contemporary charge in conversations. Alam was a true humanist with rare philosophical insight: one of the last in a series of outstanding scholars and thinkers who enlivened various regions of India during the freedom struggle and the immediate post-independence years. If his essays continue to inspire and influence us, as he did people, especially the youth, of his generation, the Forum's venture of publishing them would be well rewarded.

Our Forum was formed in December 1980. Its first seminar, held in February 1981, was attended by such celebrated personages as Kaifi Azmi and V.R. Narla. In his keynote address Narla declared: 'You will, I am sure, agree with me when I say that when we are seeing all around utter cynicism and unashamed selfishness, men of the type of Alam become very rare indeed.' The proceedings were subsequently collected and published in book form in Urdu and in English; the latter was released by Shyam Benegal. Thereafter, the Forum has held several meetings and seminars on various issues of vital concern; for instance, 'Silence is Crime' was the theme of a seminar held in 1991. A souvenir listing the activities of the Forum from 1981 to 1991 was brought out at this time. Today its distinguished members include Aziz the artist, B. Narsing Rao, Issac Sequeira, Bhaskar Shewalkar, Pramod Shinde, Syed Sirajuddin and Mughni Tabassum.

In our present endeavour we had help from many sources. A meeting of friends and admirers of Alam Khundmiri was held in Chicago a few years ago and the participants wholeheartedly supported our plan (and provided funds for initial expenditure) to publish a selection of his essays. Khadija Alam and Farrukh Siyer furnished us with manuscripts of most of the essays. Asghar Ali Engineer enriched this collection with his 'Perspectives on Islam and Philosophy.' Javeed Alam, Raj Bahadur Goud and Taqi Ali Mirza were very supportive. Many other friends—particularly, Shahid Ali Abbasi, Muhammad Zaheeruddin Ahmed, Mehdi Arslan, Ayesha Farooqui, Anwar Mouzzam, Asma Rasheed, Muslehuddin Sadi and Hussain Zishaan went through the ordeal of helping us find bibliographical details. Given the scope of Alam's scholarship, it will not be surprising that almost all the academic institutions and libraries in Hyderabad had to be ransacked to cross-check the references in the essays. It was indeed a Herculean task, and we have fulfilled it to the best of our ability. We are deeply indebted to Sage and to these friends without whose cooperation the book would perhaps have not gone to print.

M.T. Ansari's introductory essay as well as his painstaking efforts at editing need a special mention. Susie Tharu, the President of our organization, has been a force to reckon with behind all our efforts and this volume made more demands on her time than ever before.

The Forum extends its sincere thanks to all those who helped in bringing out this volume.

Hyderabad,
September 1999

Kadir Zaman
Secretary, *Forum for*
Modern Thought and Literature

Introduction: In the Interstices of an Indian Islamic Identity

M.T. ANSARI

Verily never
Will God change the condition
Of a people until they
Change it themselves... .
(Qur'an, xiii, 11)^{[1](#)}

For Europe, Islam was a lasting trauma.

Edward Said^{[2](#)}

It would be a commonplace to note that writers are, sometimes, more consequential than their writings. In Alam Khundmiri's case nothing could have been truer; he was more than a writer and he lived through a time that was formative of Hyderabad as well as indicative, even symptomatic, of the problems constantly being hurled at, that have always beset, our nation. Therefore it is crucial that we ponder on what was said in his writings, and, equally important, on what remains unsaid in his writings, on what is inscribed in the space between these essays. My introduction, then, is an attempt to put this life together from a critical perspective so as to provide a context-sensitive frame for this collection of essays.

Syed Alam Khundmiri was definitely more than a writer. Born in Hyderabad on 7 February 1922, Alam, until his death on 27 September 1983, led a politically, philosophically and aesthetically active life. Those who knew (of) him unhesitatingly declare that he was an impressive and important intellectual figure of his time. I will try, in due course, to capture, as much as possible, the richness and complexity of his life. But, briefly, his life had three major stations, corresponding to his three primary preoccupations. As one of the founder-members of the Comrades

Association,³ as a lecturer in the department of philosophy and as a respected and accepted member of the Hyderabad literati, he was always in the thick of most of the thought and action in Hyderabad.

Despite this Poundian act, of being at the vortex of the active, intellectual as well as political, life of a nation-in-process, his essays stand on their own merit. They are not just important because Alam wrote them, they are important in that through them Alam articulates his unease—always a shadowy presence, to be read between the essays—with the idea(1)s available for his time. Glancing over the titles of his essays, one can easily pinpoint those nodal points around which his thinking revolved: Islam, reason, self, time, morality, law, knowledge, modernity, secularism, Indian Sufism and, definitely, Iqbal. Given the three different locations of his self, it is understandable that his three major concerns were Marxism, existentialism and Islam.⁴ However, these influences sort of fed into each other and seem to be always present in whatever engaged his interest. Rejecting Marxism as a final/full answer, what captured Alam's interest later on in life were existentialism and Islam since they dealt with the various dimensions of life in independent India that Marxism had ignored. All the same, though the influence of Marxism had waned by the time he wrote most of these articles, it continued to inform his analyses. This interactive part of his writings suggests that the purpose of these essays is to probe the grey area of available, contemporary, options. An awareness of this juxtaposing of ideologies provides the reader with a blueprint of how 'not to read' his essays. Scholarly pieces in their own right, they have to be 'read' contextually, in their contemporary setting. They have to be seen as critical experiments where he plays off the three dominant concerns of his life: Marxism—with its indifference to questions of minorities in nationalism, existentialism—as being closed off to the problems of community and to the public composition of the self, and Islam—which is examined in relation to history and notions of time and change.

Alam's was a curiously complex life. His early education, which he received from his maternal grandfather, an authority on Persian and Arabic literature, stood him in good stead, especially after his turn from Marxism, and return to the question of Islam. Apart from his grandfather's tutelage, his mother's critical acumen and her rejection of religious orthodoxy was

another factor that impressed Alam during his formative days. From reading eastern philosophy, including a brief spell under the influence of Buddhism, Alam moved on to Marx and the radical political literature of his day. Given his dynamic personality, reading and doing were not altogether disparate activities. The years 1939–46 saw Alam plunging into Marxist activism. In 1939 he was instrumental in forming the Comrades Association, of which he was the first President. He was one of the founders of the trade union movement in Hyderabad. In 1939 he became Vice-President of the Nizam's State Railway Employees Union, and in 1941 he was President of the Allwyn Metal Workers Union. He, along with Makhdoom Mohiuddin, was closely associated with the Charminar Cigarette Factory workers' strike in 1945. But Alam was able to parallel his activism with his other interests, for in 1942 he got married⁵ and in 1943 he became a postgraduate in philosophy from Osmania University. He also wrote in various newspapers and periodicals, especially in *Payam*, the Urdu daily founded during the late 1930s by the nationalist leader Qasi Abdul Gaffar. In the 1940s, when Akhtar Hasan became the editor, Alam continued to contribute editorials and other articles to *Payam*. Since by this time his father had renounced the world and even refused to accept his school inspector's pension, Alam was forced to hunt for a job. His stint as a bank officer at the State Bank of Hyderabad was hardly congenial to his life pursuit, and fortunately, in 1948, he got an appointment as lecturer in the department of philosophy at Osmania University's College at Warangal. It is during this period that western existential philosophy attracted Alam. The reason for this shift could be his disillusionment with the Communist Party of India (CPI) after the Telengana struggle, and the 1956 Soviet armed repression of the democratic movement in Hungary. During this time Alam concentrated more on existential philosophy, as some of his essays prove. He revived his lifelong interest in Iqbal, trying to reconcile Marxism and existentialism in Iqbal. His doctoral dissertation, under the supervision of Syed Vahiduddin, the well-known Islamic scholar and philosopher, was entitled *The Concept of Time in Western and Islamic Thought, with Special Reference to Iqbal*. This is the period when Alam wrote most of the articles collected here.

Here we should bear in mind that what is described as a five-day war, the conquest of Hyderabad by the Indian state (13–17 September 1948), was a

re-run, in many ways, of the partition of the subcontinent.⁶ Sandwiched between the formation of India/Pakistan and of Bangladesh, the annexation of Hyderabad and, more importantly, its aftermath, the toll according to different accounts range from 50,000 to 200,000 Muslims massacred, must have had an immense impact on Alam, who was a 26-year-old Marxist activist at that time. Yet, the fact that Alam was able, and continued, to speak and also be heard by the Hyderabad Muslim literati is in itself significant, given the understandable suspicion of a community (composing 15 per cent of the population) and his avowed Marxist orientation. Skills of a different order are manifested here: his status as an Islamic scholar and philosopher was so firmly established that, unlike many others, he was able to speak to the Muslim community without raising their hackles. He seems to have devised different strategies of being heard by his Urdu-speaking Muslim friends and was highly successful in this endeavour, despite the fact that he was labelled a Marxist. There was a Protean aspect to his character: he was able to employ neutral subjects and resonate other people's concerns with his own and easily tell half-truths or be unduly courteous in order to keep a dialogue going. His close friends, who shared his inner beliefs, were suspicious about this aspect of Alam's personality, especially when he was seen (by them) as having made compromises. His fearless response to this criticism would have been the Whitmanesque: 'Do I contradict myself?/Very well, I contradict myself.'

The 1970s saw Alam being involved in civil liberties committees and issues of human rights. The formation of Bangladesh in 1971⁷ and the Emergency in 1975 affected him so much that we can see the Marxist strand reasserting itself around this time. His services as a Reader at the department of philosophy were terminated during the Emergency without any specific charges being made, and it took the High Court to reinstall him. After retiring, Alam continued to pursue his varied interests. For instance, in 1983 he presented a paper (the second essay in this volume) at Port of Spain, Trinidad. Later, suffering from a total renal failure, he chose to return to his native place from Canada, preferring to be at home in Hyderabad than avail advanced medical facilities abroad. As a person Alam was a kind of nomad, though he was not very keen on music,⁸ and lived only for two things: books (poetry and philosophy) and intellectual

discussions. On his deathbed, his mind was, as always, busy, engaged in philosophic discussions and reading Marquez.

Given this varied and complex trajectory, what caught my attention was the puzzle of Alam: what were the imperatives that forced him to confront his Muslimness? I think it would be immensely profitable to come to terms with this phenomenon. Muslims in India, as elsewhere and as any other religious/cultural group anywhere, are hardly homogeneous, despite the monolithic image constructed by those within and without the community. As a corollary, most of us are forced to confront, come to terms with, an essential Islamicity thrust upon us.⁹ As Said remarks: 'For almost every Muslim, the mere assertion of an Islamic identity becomes an act of nearly cosmic defiance and a necessity for survival. War seems an extremely logical outcome'.¹⁰ Given the intensity and the sensitivity of issues faced by minorities, we seem to think and feel ourselves into a corner. Hence, trying to understand why a person like Alam, who by all accounts straddled over the threshold of stable identities, was forced to address his Muslimness, I think, will provide a different angle to the problem.

My introduction in 1997 to Alam Khundmiri, fourteen years after his death, to the flavour and flaws of his vision, was, what I characterize as, a designed accident. Whichever part was accident and whatever the design, it did me a world of good, or, bluntly phrased, a world of beneficial bad, in that his life and works introduced me to the intricacies of modern Indian Islamic subjectivity, and to the politics played around it. Also, what I found most rewarding, this exposure empowered and equipped me to articulate personal dilemmas with more precision and political pertinence.

Knowing Alam and his work had a tremendous impact on my notions of self and subjectivity; he forced me to revisit scenes which had become imprinted, indelible but hitherto indecipherable, on my memory. Allow me to footnote a particular event/memory in some detail, if only because it will enable me to raise certain issues that I intend to tackle in this essay. It happened in the 1970s. The scene is a history classroom, the principal of the school is holding forth on the numerous encounters between the Mughal and the Maratha dynasties. The principal, who is also a (prominent Syrian Christian) priest, has very good oratorical skills: during his recounting of the life of Samson, the collective hair of the class used to perpetually stand

on end. As usual, he represents Aurangzeb as a bearded demonic figure and Shivaji with his flowing and graceful beard comes out as quite the heroic figure. He then narrates particular incidents where Shivaji tricks and defeats the villain with his cleverness and valour, the superior Mughal force notwithstanding. Anyone familiar with these stories will easily recognize parallels to the Robin Hood story. Before the eyes of the class, Shivaji's battles to maintain his Maratha empire were represented as nationalist struggles, while, given the Manichaean proportions of that narrative and its classical antagonists, Aurangzeb became an evil lackey of the British. None of these nuances troubled me then; in fact, I, the only Muslim in the class, wholeheartedly hoped for the destruction of the villain—I had already privately disavowed him, though the public act, indeed, was not to be so easy. Nonetheless, the eyes of the teacher returned again and again, to rivet on me. It was not that he was assuring himself that his spell was working (it undoubtedly was); no, his accusatory eyes bore into me, marking me out to myself and to the others as the spy in the class.

The persistence and ferocity of his gaze, its compulsive return, made me acutely uneasy, I remember. I wondered what he wanted of me—did he want me to declare my allegiance to Shivaji and therefore to the Indian nation or did he want me to confess my crimes and disavow Islam? Such everyday occurrences are rarely material for serious analysis. What I intended by narrating this personal account was to establish my own trajectory. In the case of Alam, the impetus must have come from innumerable similar impulses: historically specific impulses immured in the everyday exchanges of his life-world, distinctive to his own personal, socio-cultural, conceptual and political location. It will be a biographical project which traces those factors in detail; my concern, however, is with the larger logic at work in reproducing these factors.

How many 'Indias' do all of us 'Indians' actually inhabit/imagine? Though the question has far-reaching resonances, I will limit it, in this instance, to a question of an undivided India, in terms of our independence, for that was what formed an India in the first place. But wherever we go, whether it be in academic, political or personal exchanges, we hear of an India that was partitioned in 1947. Isn't the pre-partition 'India' demographically, culturally and geographically different from India? If so, why have all of us chosen to be blind to this historical fact? We talk as if an

India with a 'rich and varied heritage' attained independence and from that country a geographical and cultural section was partitioned off later. Let us get our facts right: India and Pakistan achieved freedom on the same night. What was an Indian subcontinent became two independent nations. Is this repeated aporetic moment a serious case of forgetfulness or, rather, a simple instance of remembering? And how has this reiterated interplay of forgetting and remembering inflected actual lived experiences in India?

I argue that a Muslim in India is a rem(a)inder of certain historical processes, a leftover from the partition of the Indian subcontinent to form the nation-states of India and Pakistan. In this process, the choice of a vast number of Muslims to stay in India is yet to be understood as a rational political choice.¹¹ This choice of India by Muslims, amounting to about 12 per cent of India's current population, is hardly given serious consideration and is retained as another instance, reinforcing the national imaginary, of an emotional response by an irrational community. A Muslim in India is hence a 'leftover' as well as an 'excess', a residual presence and a repository of irrationality in the body-politic of the Indian nation, and is thus perceived and narrativized. In the perception of the Indian nationalists, what constitutes the nation is hence an identity, 'Indianness', and the difference was exorcized in the form of a different nation where different people chose to go. What was elided in the process of nation building by a supposedly secular state becomes clearer now: the notion of difference. This explains to a large extent the particular form taken by the Hindu right parties and the speed and spread of the Hindutva forces; for being, as perceived by some, the only powerful political counter power in India to the secular state, the Hindu right's critique of the secular state attacks its inherent contradictions. The fact that a minority is caught in the crossfire seems to be of not much consequence to the parties. This repression of difference continues to haunt the nation and returns in the form of communal violence or riots. What I argue is that we need to redefine the nation in terms of a difference which should be seen as constitutive of the nation form, and by this I do not mean that the identities of a Muslim and a Hindu should be further pulled apart to polarize the nation, but that they should be pressurized to redefine themselves so as to break away from the dangers of a self/ other problematic. Alam, his life and works, definitely exemplify this

position/perspective.

There have been plenty of insightful studies investigating the promise and failure of Indian secularism.¹² By positing a secular state and a secular subject, which has to be fashioned from the material of a subcontinent now narrativized and read as a nation in retrospect, and by eliding the notion of difference, Indian secularism actually breeds communalism. In other words, the problems inherent in the deployment of the logic of the supplement, or supplementary logic,¹³ is at work here. Communalism is the supplement to the logic of a secular state ('the Muslims wanted a separate state, we did not want them to leave, we always advocated a living together' is the refracted refrain). By refusing to accept any responsibility for the 'sin' of sundering the 'mother country', the secular state 'treats' communalism as an aberrance, an irrational outburst, a disease, which it must control if not cure. And belying its professed secularism, the practices of the secular state and its policing of communalism actually engenders communalism.

A Muslim in India, I argue, has hence to reconstitute him/herself as a critical subject.¹⁴ However, this does not mean that there is only one position, one slot, for this subject to occupy. Nor does it mean that each of these positions are without internal conflicts. A Muslim is a critical subject not by virtue of his/her religious concerns but because of the burden of colonial and nationalist policies and practices, that is, as the result of political and historical circumstances. However, for this critical subject to assume a critical function what is required is for it to acquire a Janus-face: one face which constantly probes and prods the hegemony of the national selfhood, and the other which critically engages with its own constituted otherness. But what thwarts this process is, I feel, the historical contingencies in and through which Islam originated and evolved.

I think that it is important to keep in mind the history Islam has had in the larger context as well as the particular history it has had in the Indian subcontinent. As is widely known, Islam evolved out of a bedouin society in Mecca in Saudi Arabia early in the seventh century CE.¹⁵ Despite earlier Jewish and Christian attempts, star and idol worship flourished among the various societies in Arabia, so much that the Ka'bah was a place of pilgrimage, and also a place of trade, for all the nomadic tribes. Muhammad was born into this society—to Amina bint Wahb and Abdullah, of the

Hashimi clan of the merchant tribe of Quraish in Mecca—on 22 April 570 or 571 CE. Not much is known about the early life of this man who was to be known later as the messenger of God and who found a well-codified religion. Muhammad ibn Abdullah married Khadija, a widow engaged in trade and who was among the first of a small group to accept the messenger. Muhammad became a searcher for truth, a solitary wanderer among the hills and was in the habit of retreating regularly to a cave in the hills to pray and meditate. On one of these occasions, when he was in his forties, Muhammad became aware of a presence which informed him that he is the messenger of Allah. Thereafter he preached to a small group of people, a group which steadily increased in number, the message of Allah. ‘Allah’ was the name of one of the local gods, and in the course of another retreat the first divine revelation happened. Muhammad was asked by the presence to recite/read in the name of the lord who created man out of a mere clot of congealed blood and taught man the use of that which he knew not.¹⁶ Over the next twenty years these revelations in rhythmic prose continued and were communicated to his followers who compiled them to form 114 suras (or chapters) with some 6,616 verses called the Qur’an. Whatever be the sociology of this act of revelation, the very inception of Islam can be traced to a social imperative. The rebellion of 1857 and the Malabar uprisings of 1836–1921 are instances which substantiate the argument that Islam has continued to be a source of inspiration for concerted and concrete socio-political transformations, though the earlier spirit of intellectual enquiry appears to have become stagnant. Following Iqbal, Alam, in his own way, endeavoured—through philosophical engagement, through inference and reinterpretation—to recover these lost trends and tendencies within Islam itself. A perspective which is open to these socio-political factors as well as vibrating with the spirit of philosophical pursuit, I hope, may help us in coming to terms with the problems besetting us; it will enable Muslims to reconstitute themselves as critical subjects fulfilling a critical function for the nation, to break out of the siege mentality which determines ‘our’ thoughts and actions and to demolish the monolithic image of a monstrous community which has been at the international as well as national level imposed upon ‘us’.

Alam’s articles should also be placed within the tradition of Islam and its

rich tradition of intellectual enquiry: *Falsafah* (philosophy or ‘love of wisdom’), *kalam* (speculative theology) and *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) are some of the modes of enquiry. Following the translation movement¹⁷ during the Caliphate of the Abbasids (who came to power in 750), Ibn Hanbal, al-Kindi, al-Hallaj, al-Ash`ari and Ibn Hazm were the pioneers of philosophical enquiry in medieval Islam. Ibn Sina (Latinized form Avicenna) and al-Farabi, two intellectual giants by all accounts, dominated the scene thereafter. The flowering of the spirit of intellectual enquiry continued with al-Ghazali, Ibn Rushd (Latinized form Averroes), ar-Razi (Latinized form Rhazes), Ibn al-`Arabi, Rumi, Ibn Taymiya, Sirhindi and al-Afghani; this list is hardly exhaustive of the vast Islamic theological and philosophical tradition. Spanning a vast time period and existing parallel, though not as well-known, to the preoccupations of western thinkers, they are evidence of the complexity and intricacy of Islamic scholarship. Since Alam is careful in detailing the central arguments of each philosopher in his essays and, also, because Asghar Ali Engineer’s article (in this collection) deals with this aspect, let me concentrate, albeit in a rather cursory manner, on Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938).

Iqbal, the poet-philosopher of the Indian subcontinent, advisor and close intellectual companion of Jinnah, was born at Sialkot (now in Pakistan). After his early education, Iqbal studied philosophy at Lahore with T.W. Arnold, a reputed British Islamicist. In 1905 he left for Europe to pursue his studies. He attended M’Taggart’s lectures on philosophy and submitted his doctoral thesis on the development of metaphysics in Persia. Though he was called to the bar from Lincoln’s Inn in London, in 1908 he returned to Lahore where he taught at the Government College while pursuing an unsuccessful law practice. For his poetry, more than 50 per cent in Persian and the rest in Urdu,¹⁸ he was knighted in 1922. Within five years he was elected to the Punjab Legislative Assembly. At Allahabad, in 1930, he gave the historic presidential address at the annual session of the Muslim League. In his address he suggested that the Muslim majority areas in the northwest might be given autonomy so that Islamic norms could be followed, thereby triggering off a desire/demand for Pakistan. From 1936 onwards Iqbal, due to illness, withdrew from public/political life. His experiences abroad made him aware of the double standards of the West and returned him from

Platonic idealism, Indian nationalism and romanticism to an awareness of Islam with a vengeance. The Islam which he discovered was dynamic; its creative impulse directed the raw materials of history into a moral channel. According to him, the West was inventive, not creative, and lacked a positive moral direction; the Christian theogony too determinist. He invited the world to join this ethically energizing Islam. Two key terms in his dynamic philosophy, often articulated in Bergsonian terminology (though God, for Iqbal, was outside the process of history), are *khudi* ('self') and *'ishq* ('love') through which the self has to be expanded and fortified. Iqbal, far from being a romanticist of the past, called for the creation of a new future through *ijtihad* (literally 'exerting oneself'). The correspondence, in broad brushstrokes, as well as the contrast with Alam need not be belaboured. Whereas Iqbal returned from Platonic idealism, Alam returned from Marxist activism; Islam is the central point for a 'comeback', of a convergence, for both. If Iqbal was frustrated by the existing order in the West, in Alam's case, given the events of 1947 and 1948, it could well have been the contradictions of Indian nationalist thought.

The role of nationalist politics in constructing and circulating a demonic figure of Islam is too well known. The 1921 Malabar uprisings form what can be described as a watershed in Indian history. Despite criticism from various sources, Gandhi persisted with his mass campaign¹⁹ and involved himself with the Khilafat struggle. However, after the Malabar rebellion, he was shocked by the 'violence' he had helped unleash and thereafter the two-nation option was the only one remaining in the horizon of possibilities for Hindu as well as Muslim leaders, nationalist or otherwise. The 1921 rebellion and various riots which followed it determined the course history was to take. With the formation of Pakistan and the violence associated with it in popular perception—reinforced by historical narratives of partition as a loss or betrayal—'Muslims' in India came to be emblematic of an excess within the state. This prejudice against Muslims is strengthened by histories which construct them as invaders; the 'true' history in this version rules out any possibility of recounting a shared past and ends by questioning their patriotism. The Muslim, in the words of Devji, 'represents a fundamental anxiety of nationalism itself: of the nation as something unachieved'.²⁰ Two things follow from this: one, all problems which threaten the nation get

mapped or displaced on to the Muslim, and two, Muslims themselves bear the burden of the communal in their psyche and re-mark themselves as victims and aggressors. Devji says something interesting in this connection. The actual contest taking place is between a secular state nationalism and a Hindu nationalism. Hindu nationalism, which is the only forceful form of resistance to the secular state, is interested in the Muslim only because Muslims allow themselves to be used as vote banks by the established parties. Of course, the failure of Muslim parties to form any meaningful strategies of representation is indeed a real problem; perhaps there were no historical/political opportunities for such an opening. This failure could also be a result of a perception on the part of the Muslim leadership that Muslims form a single monolithic entity in India, whereas the truth is that from Mappilas to Meos there exist a wide range of differences within the Muslim. To loop back, Muslims are targeted by Hindu nationalism because Muslims thwart their efforts to engage with the secular state form. However, by refusing to read the problems underlying its avowed secularism, the secular state refuses to engage with Hindu nationalism and reads communalism as an irrational conflict which it must control if not cure. Thus, Muslims ‘constitute only the site of struggle between two forms of nationalism’.²¹ A result of this is that all serious engagement with Islam—something like the scholarly debates of the earlier part of this century between Hindu and Muslim theologians—disappeared absolutely. Now it no longer matters what different Muslim communities in different states perceive of themselves and their predicament; ‘an essentialized identity is simply imposed’²² on them. Since the decision made by a large number of Muslims to stay on in India in 1947 was never understood by ‘Indians’ as a rational choice, during wars, and in a more quotidian manner, during cricket matches, Muslim support for Pakistan cannot be considered a rational choice, since reading it as a rational choice would entail interpreting this ‘unpatriotic’ act as resistance and as an attempt at self-determination which would expose the nation-state as a failure and a lie. Muslims in India are the repositories of irrationality and violence, this leads to the creation of a siege mentality which forecloses any attempt for a serious and considered engagement with Islam or within Islam.

Arriving on the scene of history at such a juncture, the options for a

Muslim are very limited. There is an urgent need for serious attempts by Muslims themselves to critically engage with Islam and with the interplay of various forces in the transition of several societies to Islam in various regions of the subcontinent. The question of Islam, and the questions raised by Islam, are increasingly becoming important today at the national as well as the international level. This positional vitality—which Islam shares with postcolonial perspectives of gender, caste, race and class—would be best put to use if the force of its critique is centrifugal as well as centripetal. It is today virtually impossible for a Muslim to interrogate Islam given the space s/he occupies within the community and the space that that community occupies in the larger context.

Akeel Bilgrami,²³ as against my notion of a critical subject fulfilling a critical function, proposes the category of a ‘moderate’ Muslim, occupying the interstitial space between what he calls the first person, the orthodox believer, and the third person, the purely secular. Bilgrami’s resolution seems problematic to me, because, an orthodox Muslim would anyway be drawn apart by the socio-political tensions so much that s/he could not but translate back onto the first person, defensive, even fundamentalist, position. On the other hand, the Muslim who could obtain to the third person secular position would, I argue, be marked by gender, class, even caste, in such a manner that the internal critique from this position would be counter-productive. One has only to remember the controversial *Satanic Verses* episode²⁴ here to understand the complexity of the problem. Bilgrami’s formulation of a ‘moderate’ Muslim, mapping it onto a modernist problematic, marks the (immoderate) Muslim as always-already fanatical and fundamentalist, and burdens the Muslim with a guilt which has to be purged through self-criticism. My contention is that Muslims are critical subjects because of the particular nature of their, historically determined, self-identity. Hence, it is absolutely essential for us to pay attention to and ‘hear’ such subjects as have been successful in traversing this conflictual terrain; those, who in translating themselves successfully to and fro between different imperatives, in being able to articulate a critique from Islam as well as of Islam, retain a double-edgedness peculiar to their situation. In Alam, his life and his work, we have a figure cutting both ways, displaying a centrifugal thrust and a centripetal incisiveness. A voice

like that of Alam's can easily be misread as self-criticism, whereas his agenda was actually energized by the organic activity of critiques: of Marxism, existentialism, modernism and Islam. My agenda in this introduction has been to bring out this implied critique in Alam as well as to stress the import he has for our times.

Why is Alam an important figure of our past? The answer lies in the pastness of such figures, in the disappearance of such figures from our present. Instead of the envisaged secularization, what we witness these days is the increasing sacralization of politics, and in this performance the main actors are often predictably stereotypical figures. In this context, Alam is a refreshing scholar, with his Marxist activism, his philosophical pursuits, his positive engagement with Islam and his penchant for life and literature, especially Urdu poetry, and gin. As remarked earlier, Alam was a sort of organic intellectual who organized the emerging intelligentsia of his time. Alam's engagement with nationalism, Marxism, existentialism, Islam and Sufism reveal the dual edge of his project: to situate Islam in the modern context and to scrutinize the modern in the light of Islam. Among these twin projects, that of situating Islam in the modern world is more visible in his work and the latter has to be mostly read off from the former. Definitely his was a persistent internal critique of Islam, spanning such wide concerns as Islamic traditionalism and the demands of modernization, problems of inter-religious understanding, questions of law and morality, western and Indian concepts of secularism, the destruction of the vital strand of philosophical inquiry in Islam, Sufism and Iqbal.

'The intersection of the eternal and the temporal is never alike in two moments of history. This quality of intersection gives to each moment a uniqueness of its own'.²⁵ These original and scholarly essays, exhibiting a wide range of interests, were written during such unique moments. Such moments may (not) repeat themselves in other lives, but undeniably Alam's astounding depth of active knowledge, especially about Islamic theology, philosophy and literature, have left their indelible imprint on these essays. I cannot possibly do justice to all the thoughts and themes in Alam's essays, and will briefly comment on one aspect: Alam's engagement with existentialism. Existentialism is of primary importance as it is the interface between Marxism and Islam in Alam's life. A cue to Alam's interest in

existentialism is provided by the rather indifferent treatment accorded to Jean-Paul Sartre in the essays. This is all the more illuminating since Sartre tried to endow existentialism with a Marxist thrust. Alam notes: Sartre was ‘generally insensitive to the deeper religious longings of man’.²⁶ ‘[E]xistentialism arose as a revolt against this civilization which was reducing man into a mere technological object. It was born out of the consciousness of crisis ... [and the resultant] despair’, comments Alam, adding that the Marxist revolt shared such an awareness of crisis but did not ‘move to the limit of despair’.²⁷ Existentialism attracted Alam because it widened the horizon of answers for him, for existentialism was guided by the motive of reviving the prophetic elements of the western civilization, hitherto suppressed by the force of reason. As he remarks, ‘The God-fearing Kierkegaard was as much disgusted with his contemporary western civilization as the God-denying Nietzsche was’.²⁸ Compared to Marxism—which pronounces that ‘man’ makes his own history though this process is itself historically determined and tries to resolve problems at the socio-economic level—existentialism is alert to another dimension. Alam designates this aspect the dimension of our religious aspirations where the existence of God is not of primary importance, for there can be religious atheism as well as atheistic religions; Alam perceived Marxism as steadily evolving into the latter category. In this regard, one finds it interesting that the western existential thinkers whom he engages with—Nietzsche, Kierkegaard and Heidegger—were to become central figures in poststructuralist and postmodern thought. Alam writes: ‘There is a fundamental difference between the rebellion of Marx, Nietzsche and Kierkegaard. The rebellion of Marx was partial, whereas the rebellion of Nietzsche and Kierkegaard was total’.²⁹ This existentialist phase of Alam’s life slowly feeds into his engagement with the question of Islam. Iqbal is the pivot of this interaction between two different perspectives, for in Iqbal we find that ‘the essence of human reality is transcendence’ which resonates with the existentialist conception. From the ardent Marxist activist that he was to the scholar of religious aspirations, we find Alam prodding his own thought processes in an attempt to evolve an organic vision, a dynamic sense of humankind’s destiny in Marxist, existentialist and Islamic terms, combining an awareness of history, politics, economics,

of inner aspirations and of questions of time, self, reason, morality and law.

After all that is said and done, two of Alam's remarks, re-cited by his friends, remain with me. The first one is self-reflexive. In the seminar organized at his 60th birthday and in response to those of his friends who had only known certain aspects of his multiplex personality and were at a loss to fathom his objectives or his motivation, Alam remarked: 'I would like to remain radical'. The second is from an infuriated Alam, angry at an angry friend: while travelling in a car, Alam and this friend were inconvenienced by a religious procession, with drums and all. To his impatient and irritated friend's comments bemoaning the fate of the people, Alam flared up: 'Why? Are they not people? What makes you think that they don't know what they are doing?' These snatches of conversation, already framed by the past, continue, for me, to tug at something vital. They yank our frames of comprehension, raising fundamental and extremely uncomfortable questions regarding the conclusions we have drawn about our/other positions. I could not have thought of a better way to conclude this introduction to the selected essays of Alam.

¹ Abdullah Yusuf Ali's translation entitled *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an* (Cairo and Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-Masri and Dar al-Kitab Allubnani, 1934), vol. 1, p. 606.

² *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978), p. 59.

³ Comrades Association, the brainchild of a group of young Hyderabad radicals, came into being in 1939 and was instrumental in disseminating Marxist ideology. It also functioned as a front for the Communist Party of India during its formative phase and was a key factor in inaugurating and intensifying the Marxist movement in Andhra Pradesh.

⁴ His friends, also, speak of his life as broadly spaced into the Marxist, the existentialist and the Islamic phases. I am thankful to those of Alam's friends who generously spent time grappling with the mosaic of their memories, and me, to provide as clear a picture as possible of a turbulent time.

⁵ To Khadija; the story goes that on the eve of his marriage he was so busy organizing a workers' strike that he reached home late with an injured leg.

⁶ See, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, 'Hyderabad: Muslim Tragedy;' (pp. 1–25); Mir Laiq Ali, 'The Five Day War' (pp. 26–63); Clyde Eagleton, 'The Case of Hyderabad Before the Security Council' (pp. 64–89); Pandit Sundarlal and Qazi Muhammad Abdulghaffar, introduced by Omar Khalidi, 'A Report on the Post-Operation Polo Massacres, Rape and Destruction or Seizure of Property in Hyderabad State' (pp. 95–115); and Theodore Paul Wright, Jr, 'National Integration and Modern

Judicial Procedure in India: The Dar-us-Salam Case' (pp. 142–49) in Omar Khalidi, ed. *Hyderabad: After the Fall* (Kansas: Hyderabad Historical Society, 1988). A more recent work is Lucien D. Benichon, *From Autocracy to Integration: Political Developments in Hyderabad State (1938–1948)* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2000).

[7](#) Another reminder of (sub)nationalism, the recurring remainder in the history of the subcontinent.

[8](#) Revealing his appreciation of painting and his grasp of artistic techniques, Alam's publications include the text of a monograph on the well-known painter, *Sayeed Bin Mohammed* (Hyderabad: Andhra Pradesh Lalit Kala Academi, 1978).

[9](#) Edward Said's *Orientalism* still provides the best exposition of the imbrication of politics and knowledge, of the mechanics and methodologies of power/knowledge. He observes that

India itself never provided an indigenous threat to Europe. Rather it was because native authority crumbled there and opened the land to inter-European rivalry and to outright European political control that the Indian Orient could be treated by Europe with such proprietary hauteur—never with the sense of danger reserved for Islam (p. 75).

In his *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (New York: Pantheon, 1981), Said notes:

'Islam' can now have only two possible general meanings, both of them unacceptable and impoverishing. To Westerners and Americans, 'Islam' represents a resurgent atavism, which suggests not only the threat of a return to the Middle Ages but the destruction of what is regularly referred to as the democratic order in the Western world. For a great many Muslims, on the other hand, 'Islam' stands for a reactive counterresponse to this first image of Islam as a threat (p. 51).

[10](#) *Covering Islam*, p. 72.

[11](#) This is all the more serious since this decision should be considered in the light of developments which saw talk of a secular Pakistan giving way to the idea of an Islamic Pakistan. Another separate secular state had no real rationale behind it and only made everybody uneasy, since it exposed the political (and personal) power struggle at work, shaping the nature of the subcontinent's future freedom.

[12](#) Gyanendra Pandey's *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990) is of particular interest in this context. See, also, his 'The Prose of Otherness', *Subaltern Studies VIII*, David Arnold and David Hardiman, eds (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994).

[13](#) Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns

Hopkins University Press, 1976).

[14](#) I borrow this phrase from Lyotard, despite his decree that in the postmodern condition the critical subject is henceforth an improbable function; see, Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), p. 13. A 'critical subject' would be one whose subject position works against the grain of grand hegemonizing narratives. Women, post-or neo-colonial peoples, minorities, dalits and the subaltern classes would, by virtue of their 'location', be critical subjects.

[15](#) Following Alam's practice in the essays, all years are in Common Era (CE) in the interests of quicker comprehension for a wider readership. However, the Islamic Era dates are sometimes retained in the bibliographical references.

[16](#) This appears as the opening verses of sura xcvi; see, Abdullah Yusuf Ali's translation (vol. 2, i–v, 1761–62). I am not reproducing the verses since they are cited, from a different source, in Asghar Ali Engineer's 'Perspectives on Islam and Philosophy' in this collection, p. 32.

[17](#) Translations of Greek scientific and philosophical texts were undertaken during this period, especially those of Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus.

[18](#) Iqbal's major prose work is *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (1934). Iqbal's major Urdu poetical works are *Bang-e Dara* (1924; 'The Call of the Bell' which includes 'Shikwah' or 'The Complaint', 'Jawab-e Shikwah' or 'The Answer to the Complaint', and 'Khidr-e Rah' or 'Khidr, the Guide'); *Bal-e Jibril* (1935; 'Gabriel's Wing'), *Zarb-e Kaleem* (1937; 'The Blow of Moses') and *Gulshan-e Raz-e Jadid* ('The New Rose Garden of Mystery'). His Persian collections are *Asrar-e Khudi* (1915; 'The Secrets of the Self'), *Rumaz-e Bikhudi* (1918; 'Mysteries of Selflessness'), *Payam-e Mashriq* (1923; 'Message of the East' which includes 'Nawa-e Waqt' or 'The Melody of Time', 'Lala-e Tur' or 'The Tulip of Sinai' and 'Masjid-e Qurtuba' or 'The Mosque of Cordoba'), *Zabur-e Ajam* (1927; 'Persian Psalms'), *Javid Nama* (1932; 'The Song of Eternity' or 'The Epic of Javid') and the posthumous *Armaghan-e Hijaz* (1938; 'Gift of Hijaz' which contains some poems in Urdu also). *Iqbal Nama*, compiled by Sheikh Attuallah, *Kulliyat-e Iqbal* (Persian) and *Stray Reflections: A Notebook of Allama Iqbal* (1915; speeches, ed., Javid Iqbal) are collections of Iqbal's writings.

[19](#) For a critique of political liberation taking precedence over socio-economic emancipation, from the Dalit perspective, see B.R. Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, An Undelivered Speech, Mulk Raj Anand, ed. (1936; New Delhi: Arnold Publishers, 1990).

[20](#) Faisal Fatehali Devji, 'Hindu/Muslim/Indian', *Public Culture* 5.1 (Fall 1992), pp. 1–25.

[21](#) Ibid., p. 7.

[22](#) Ibid., p. 8; see, also, Ayesha Jalal, especially 'Exploding Communalism: The Politics of Muslim Identity in South Asia, in *Nationalism, Democracy and Development: State and Politics in India*, Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal, eds (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 76–103.

[23](#) Akeel Bilgrami, in 'What Is a Muslim? Fundamental Commitment and Cultural Identity' formulates the problem in these terms:

It is because their commitment to Islam today is to a large extent governed by a highly defensive function that moderate Muslims find it particularly difficult to make a substantial and sustained criticism of Islamic doctrine; and this ... leaves them open to be exploited by the political efforts of absolutist movements, which exploit the doctrine for their own ends. Their defensiveness inhibits them with the fear that such criticisms would amount to a surrender to the forces of the West, which have so long shown a domineering colonial and postcolonial contempt for their culture. Thus it is that the historically determined function of their commitment, the source of their very self-identity, loops back reflexively on Muslims to paralyze their capacities for self-criticism (*Critical Inquiry* 18.4 [Summer 1992], p. 835).

[24](#) It is a revealing instance that when Rushdie's predicament had prompted a playwright, Brian Clark, to write a play about it, Rushdie rushed towards legal remedies, apart from personally expressing his anger and resentment to the playwright. Rushdie's response to Brian Clark's play is thus a telling comment not only on Rushdie himself but also on what are regarded as genuine grievances and the ways they might be re-(a)ddressed. See, for more details, Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), ch. 8, fn. 9, 283–84.

[25](#) Alam Khundmiri, 'Contemporary Religious Situation: An Existential Analysis', in this collection, p. 298.

[26](#) See, 'Iqbal and Existentialist Thinkers: Nietzsche, Kierkegaard and Heidegger' in this volume, p. 201.

[27](#) 'Contemporary Religious Situation: An Existential Analysis', p. 283.

[28](#) Ibid. p. 284.

[29](#) Ibid.

Perspectives on Islam and Philosophy

ASGHAR ALI ENGINEER

Islam is not only a great religion which liberated human beings from the clutches of superstition and made them aware of nature and its laws but also enriched human culture, thought and philosophy. Its contribution in these fields is immense. The Arabs did not give much importance to learning before Islam appeared on the scene. They were proud of the science of genealogy, and also made immensely rich contributions to poetry. But nothing else interested them much. They were not even interested in literacy; in fact they took pride in being illiterate. Like other tribals, they were very proud of oral culture. When Islam appeared on the scene, we are told by historians that there were only seventeen literate persons in Mecca.

However, Islam gave a great deal of importance to reading, writing and learning. *`Ilm* (knowledge/science) is repeatedly stressed in the Qur'an. Some of the attributes of Allah are the *`alim* (knower), *khafir* (informed), etc. 'Read' is one of the commandments of Allah. The Qur'an says, 'Read and thy Lord is most Generous, Who taught by the pen, Taught man what he knew not. Nay, man is surely inordinate, Because he looks upon himself as self-sufficient' (Qur'an, xciv, 3–7). And as for *`ilm* and its numerous derivatives, we find hundreds of verses. The Qur'an in fact equates *`ilm* with *nur* (light) and *jahl* (ignorance) with darkness. The Prophet also encouraged learning by his famous saying that the ink of a scholar is more precious than the blood of a martyr.

It was because of this encouragement of learning and scholarship that Islam changed the whole scenario within a few years of its existence and created an ocean of knowledge. The Arabs soon became great patrons of learning and there appeared not only volumes after volumes on religious sciences like the *hadith* (the Prophet's sayings and doings), *tafsir* (commentaries on the Qur'an), *fiqh* (jurisprudence) and biographical writings on the Prophet but also rich contributions to secular knowledge—

be it philosophy, art and literature, political science, history and sociology or be it geography, physics, chemistry, medicine or optics. They developed such a taste for knowledge that they scoured all possible sources of knowledge and translated into Arabic from whatever was available in Greek, Persian and Sanskrit. The Abbasid rulers founded what was known as *Bait al-Hikmat*, the House of Wisdom. This institution was the only institution of learning and knowledge of its time in the whole world. It was at this place that treasures of knowledge from Greece, Persia and India were stored and rendered into Arabic. It was perhaps the largest and richest library of its time. It is worth noting that it was around this time, when Muslims were spreading the light of knowledge, that Europe was passing through its dark ages. The Islamic world gave humanity philosophers like al-Farabi, Avicenna (Ibn Sina), and Avveroes (Ibn Rushd). Their works were taught in European universities during the medieval ages. In fact, Europe rediscovered Greek treasures of knowledge through the Islamic scholarship of West Asia. The Ismailis had produced by the ninth century CE the *Ikhwanus Safa*, what was hailed as the encyclopaedia of knowledge. It was written in fifty-two volumes. There were works on religion, philosophy, psychology, mathematics and music, apart from many other sciences. Jabir bin al-Hayyan was a great chemist. Imam J'far as-Sadiq, the great *imam*, was not only a great expert in Islamic sciences but was also knowledgeable in various other sciences as we find in his book *Kitab al-Tawhid*, a compilation of his lectures. His great grandfather Ali, son-in-law of the Prophet, also encompassed all available knowledge in his great book *Nahj al-Balagha* which has been hailed by many modern western scholars also. No wonder then that H.G. Wells described the Arabs as foster-fathers of knowledge. It is true that the Arabs themselves were not so much interested in the acquisition of knowledge as other non-Arab Muslims, but they provided the encouragement and resources needed for other Muslims to do so. And these Muslims drew their inspiration from the Qur'an and the sayings of the Prophet.

It was not only during the Abbasid period that philosophy and other sciences flowered in the Islamic world. Even during the Umayyad period a number of different schools of philosophy came into existence. There was heated discussion on questions like whether the human person was free or

determined. Those who thought that a person was free were known as the Qadriyas and those who thought human life was divinely ordained and therefore not free were called the Jabriyas. In fact this question acquired political overtones—the supporters of Umayyads stressing that human beings are not free but determined by divine will and their opponents maintaining that they are free. Al-Hasan al-Basari, the great Sufi scholar of the first century of Islam was an adherent of free will. It was his disciple who became the founder of a rational school of philosophy called the school of Mu`tazilites in Islamic history. They were the first rationalists of Islam.

The Mu`tazilites were fiercely opposed by traditionalists known as *mutakallimun* (i.e., theological dialecticians or simply dialecticians). T.J. de Boer observes:

The name *mutakallimun*, which was at first common to all the dialecticians, was in later times applied specially to the anti-Mu`tazilite and orthodox theologians. In the latter case it might be well, following the sense, to render the term by dogmatists or schoolmen. In fact while the first dialecticians had the dogma still to form, those who came later had only to expound and establish it.¹

The rationalists (Mu`tazilites and other rationalists represented by the great philosophers like Avicenna and others) and the *mutakallimun* were, in the history of Islamic philosophy, always at daggers drawn and these controversies provided much dynamism to Islamic scholars. In later times, however, the rationalists lost and the dialecticians won. Thus the common Muslims followed the Ash`arites (named after its founder al-Ash`ari) who were vehemently opposed to rationalists. They are also known as atomists. According to them, each atom is created, in each moment, by Allah and destroyed by Him. What we perceive as the sensible world are mere passing accidents created by Allah. This theory became prevalent among the common Muslims mainly due to the support lent to it by Imam al-Ghazali. Al-Ghazali was one of the greatest dialecticians of the world of Islam. His *Ihya' al-`Ulum* ('Revivification of Knowledge') is still widely read and has influenced a very large number of Muslims. He also wrote the *Tahafut al-Falasifa* ('The Bewilderment of Philosophers') to point out the deficiencies

of philosophers. Avveroes wrote a strong rejoinder which he named *Tahafut Tahafut al-Falasifa* ('The Bewilderment of the Bewilderment of Philosophers').

Thus, a number of intellectual controversies raged in the intellectual history of Islam and the early history of Islam was intellectually quite dynamic. It would appear that no formulation, be it conservative or free-thinking, ever went unchallenged. Though it is true that it was the dialecticians who ultimately prevailed and the rationalists who lost, this is not unique to the history of Islam. The history of Hinduism, Buddhism, or Christianity is no different. When a religion acquires mass proportions, intellectuals lose their influence. The masses find greater security in accepting than in questioning. It is acceptance which creates a sense of inner peace while questioning perpetrates scepticism and a sense of uncertainty. Blind faith is far more soothing for the ordinary human soul. This is part of human nature and not of any religion or religious belief system. The revealed word is often ambiguous and subject to different interpretations. While the people of intellect look for stimulation from this ambiguity, theologians look for fixed meanings and carve out dogmas which are then widely accepted by unquestioning minds. Great minds refuse to simply accept these humanly formulated concepts and by questioning these not only provide stimuli to human thought, but enrich it and develop it.

We find such great minds in the intellectual history of all the world religions. Alam Khundmiri, besides being a progressive thinker and philosopher, has tried to portray in the philosophical essays now collated in this book, these stimulating controversies in early and modern Islam. Alam was very knowledgeable and has brought to bear the depth of his learning in these philosophical essays. There is hardly any controversy in medieval or modern Islam which Khundmiri has left untouched. It would, therefore, be of special interest to throw light on some of these essays and critically examine the nature of these controversies. Alam himself was deeply interested in these questions which had always occupied the great minds in Islamic history.

Alam touches on a very important question in his essay on 'The Tension between Morality and Law in Islam'. It is well-known that jurisprudence and law occupy a very significant place in Islamic thought. Islam was first

preached in a tribal society which had no written law but only oral traditions. The Prophet was confronted with many questions pertaining to marriage, divorce, inheritance, property, accumulation of wealth, slaves and so on. His preoccupation was a just society and many prevailing traditions were far from just, specially for the weaker sections of the society. The Qur'an also stressed the importance of justice and a just society.

Thus Alam points out:

An ethical vision might have an historical element whereas the actual legal injunction is necessarily a specific response to an actual temporal situation. The relation between the ethical vision and the latter is more of a psychological nature which colours and influences the universe of human intentions and desires. However, there always remains a gap between the basic ethical vision and the actual commands and injunctions. Later this gap reveals itself in the life-style of those who prefer to act according to the letter of the law and those who prefer to strive to get at the historical vision, the basic piety which might be common to more than one historical religion. A serious study of any religion, its dogma and its legal structure reveals this difference [p. 140 in this volume].

Alam goes right to the root of the problem. Those who oppose any change prefer to go by the letter of the law and totally ignore the ethical vision. For pro-changers, it is the historical vision which is most important and not legal injunctions pronounced at a particular historical juncture. The debate goes on in all religious traditions. As far as Islam is concerned, justice is a very important element of its ethical vision. Says the Qur'an,

O you who believe, be upright for Allah, bearers of witness with justice; and let not hatred of a people incite you not to act equitably. Be just; that is nearer to observance of duty. And keep your duty to Allah. Surely Allah is aware of what you do (v, 8).

The Qur'an also says that '... when you speak, be just, though it be (against) a relative' (vi, 152).

Thus justice is central to the ethical vision of Islam, but the Shariah was a

project that evolved at a particular historical juncture. The orthodox maintain that the Shariah is immutable as it is based on divine injunctions. This is causing a lot of problems today with respect to women's rights. Alam also points out in his essay that in Islam religiosity and morality have become synonymous with legality. This position needs to be corrected. In fact religiosity and morality should have an upper hand, and not legality. Legality should be subordinate to a moral and ethical vision. He also very rightly points out that the principle of *sunna*, so far as general Muslims are concerned, does not normally include the element of the moral fervour of the Prophet and his strong passion for the liberation of man, translated into action as far as concrete situations of life could permit. The only way to make the Shariah conform to the moral fervour of the Prophet and the ethical vision of Islam is to effect necessary changes in it.

Al-Ghazali, as pointed out before, was the pillar of revivalism in Islam in the eleventh century. His project had a profound effect on Islamic thinking throughout the subsequent history of Islam. Al-Ghazali challenged the rational trends in his days and re-established an Islamic orthodoxy. He influenced Islamic thinking so profoundly that a bold writer of the modern Arab world, al-Qusaimi, is of the opinion that the Muslim world cannot enter the age of enlightenment unless it rejects al-Ghazali's world view.

Alam Khundmiri points out that Indian writers on Islamic thought are, however, still under the spell of al-Ghazali and go to the extent of comparing him to scientific philosophers like Hume and Kant, as if long ago al-Ghazali had anticipated them. In fact, no less a person than Dr Muhammad Iqbal compared al-Ghazali with Kant in his lectures *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*.

Khundmiri says that a careful study of al-Ghazali shows he was a fatalist in ethics, an obscurantist in his philosophical methods and a justifier of status quo in political theory. All these elements of his thought, he says, proceed from his philosophical method. Al-Ghazali was a rationalist, even an atheist, at one stage of his life. However, in his search for truth, he was dissatisfied with ratiocination and ultimately turned towards *tasawwuf* for inner peace and spiritual solace. Khundmiri rightly points out that al-Ghazali is the acknowledged leader of orthodox Islam. It was he who gave a final and decisive blow to Islamic scholastic philosophy based on Aristotelian and Neoplatonic sources. This was such a decisive blow that

philosophy ceased to remain a respectable term in the Islamic world and even the powerful counter arguments of Ibn Rushd (in his *Tahafut Tahafut al-Falasifa*) were not able to revive the respectability once attached to philosophy. Posterity remembered al-Ghazali as 'the proof of Islam' (*hujjat al-Islam*).

According to al-Ghazali, rationalism led to scepticism and doubt, and doubt is far from reassuring in human life; the only way out of these doubts for al-Ghazali was to base religious doctrine upon an inner, supra-rational illumination. Thus, in search of inner peace, al-Ghazali turned to mysticism. Alam, therefore, rightly thinks that al-Ghazali represents a rare combination of theologian and mystic in the history of Islamic civilization. No other person before or after him could achieve this distinction of being equally acceptable to both. He gave to theology a mystic orientation and to mysticism a theological foundation.

Here Alam has somewhat exaggerated the importance of al-Ghazali. In fact, after al-Ghazali, Mujaddid Alf Thani from India achieved such a respectability in both theological and mystical circles. Though one does not find in the writings of al-Ghazali a critique of Ibn al-`Arabi's doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud*, one finds such a critique in the writings of the Mujaddid. Mujaddid, like al-Ghazali, changed the course of Islamic thought in India. Though a powerful critic of the *wahdat al-wujud* doctrine, Mujaddid remained a Sufi and evolved his own doctrine of *wahdat al-shuhud*. Shah Waliullah and others largely followed Mujaddid Alf Thani and the Waliullahi school's contribution to Islamic thought in the Indian subcontinent is too well-known to be recounted here.

Al-Ghazali strengthened the Ash`ari doctrine of occasionalism. According to this view, occasionalistic metaphysics with its theory of indivisible atoms and accidents had made all secondary agents (like human beings) superfluous and philosophically irrelevant. According to al-Ash`ari, God creates accidents at each moment and the universe consists of these accidents. Thus the universe is created, according to this view, by the direct will of God. Human agents have no role to play, no creativity or initiative. Human beings are determined objects and not active, creative subjects. The moment the efficacy of the secondary agents is repudiated, the principle of causality pertaining to the world of events becomes superfluous.

Alam however, points out that al-Ghazali and the Ash`arites did not deny

that the world appears continuous; what they denied was that this continuity is an inherent feature of this world. Their position was that continuity proves the 'grace' of God and miracles establish his omnipotence.

There has been a long debate among intellectuals as to how al-Ghazali could deliver such a blow to rational philosophic thought in Islam. Was it due to the inherent strength and superiority of his theologico-mystical arguments or due to some other external factors? Many argue that it was the former and others maintain that it was contingent on the historical circumstances. However, a balanced view should be taken. As far as the *jamhur* (masses) are concerned, they more often than not, opt for certitude of faith over the nagging doubts of rational thinking. It is the intellectual élite who can face the hazards of nagging doubts. The masses would opt for the certitude of orthodox dogmas. As pointed out before, al-Ghazali was also initially enamoured of rational philosophy but he found no inner certitude and solace at the time. This he ultimately found in mystic thought. It is also interesting to note that the Mu'tazilites also did not survive long in the history of Islam as their approach was rational. It is the Ash'arite doctrines which found wide acceptance.

As for external factors, it is important to note that al-Ghazali's period was the period of decline of the Abbasid empire which was finally dealt a death blow by the sack of Baghdad in 1258. In such circumstances it is conservatism that thrives and it did. Rational thought reached its glory during the heyday of the Abbasid empire. Persian intellectuals were the mainstay of Abbasid rule and the Mu'tazilites became their political ally. But during the period of its decline, the Mu'tazilites lost their political influence and were severely persecuted by the Abbasid Caliph al-Mutawakkil. Thus, both internal and external factors worked to the advantage of Islamic orthodoxy and Imam al-Ghazali came to be accepted as the 'proof of Islam'.

It can be argued that though the Abbasid Caliphate was in decline, strengthening the conservative school of thought, the Islamic empires in Spain, Iran and India were at the height of their glory. Why then did al-Ghazali's thought prevail in these regions also? There is no simple answer but nevertheless the question has to be confronted and some answer attempted. First, the Abbasid empire came to acquire a central position in the world of Islam. Other rulers often derived their legitimacy from their

sanction. No other ruler enjoyed such primacy as the Abassids did, rightly or wrongly. They were looked upon as the real legitimate Caliphs. Even the Shi'ite Buwayhid sultans had to maintain the façade of being Abbasid caliphs. The Spanish, Persian and Indian Muslim rulers were treated as peripheral and their rise and decline did not have a major impact on the intellectual currents in the world of Islam.

But in these peripheral Islamic empires one finds glorious periods of intellectual enlightenment, be it during the Fatimid empire of Egypt, the Safavids of Iran, the Mughals of India or the Islamic rule in Spain. There is a definite relationship between political hegemony, material development and intellectual achievements though it may not be a one-to-one relationship. However, one must say that though one may not agree with al-Ghazali all the way, one cannot deny his seminal role in the intellectual history of Islam. He was a towering figure.

Alam also deals with another important question which preoccupied the great minds in the intellectual history of Islam, i.e., man's nature and destiny. He deals with this question in his essay 'Man's Nature and Destiny: The Philosophic View in Islam'. The Ash'arites, as pointed out before, dominated the religious viewpoint in the world of Islam. While the Mu'tazilites emphasized moral freedom and the responsibility of man, the Ash'arites held the contrary view. According to them, man was unfree. But even the Ash'arites could not dismiss the fact of felt freedom and were obliged, Khundmiri points out, 'to offer an ingenious explanation of the ultimate freedom in terms of "acquisition" [*kasb*], metaphysically derived from the doctrine of "occasionalism", constant intervention of Allah in the life of the cosmos and man. In this scheme man is reduced to an automaton, devoid of will, freedom, and even responsibility. At each moment he faces death and extinction, and next moment is granted resurrection by the grace of Allah' (p. 110 in this volume).

In the legal schools also, the superiority of the legal category over the metaphysical and eschatological was established and the legists took a horizontal view of man. Ultimately this neglect of the vertical, Alam feels, resulted in a complete negation of it. Alam goes on to make a very radical statement—though it is difficult to disagree with him on this—that a study of Islam in history reveals a fact of immense importance for the study of religious phenomena: laicization of religion does not ultimately lead to a

secular approach in politics and general human life but results in tyrannical theocracy, which happened in the history of Islam after the period of the Khulafa-e Rashidun (i.e., the four Caliphs after the holy Prophet).

The man who was described by the Qur'an as the viceregent of God on earth became a passive spectator of the divine drama on earth and a mere recipient of the divine commandments as interpreted by the legists. Salvation in this scheme, points out Khundmiri, largely depends on the literal obedience of the law while the life of the spirit is relegated to the background.

There has always been a debate on reason and revelation among the philosophers in Islam. The philosophers, though they stress the role of reason in human life, do not reject the supremacy of revelation. They too accept the consensus of the community that revelation supersedes reason, though reason by no means is insignificant. They make an interesting connection between reason and revelation. Revelation, for them, is more than the mere spoken word. Revelation itself is the revelation of divine reason. Both al-Farabi and Ibn Sina assert the essential unity of reason and revelation. It is interesting to note that the Ismailis (also referred to as the *Batiniya*) held very similar views with the philosophers. In fact it is claimed by some scholars that Ibn Sina was a secret Ismaili. Philosophers, like the Ismailis, held that man's existence in this world is a fall in the material sense but a journey upwards in the spiritual sense. *Kathif* (material) tends to become *latif* (spiritual) as man achieves a higher and higher degree of perfection. The spirit's association with matter is its descent but it rises upwards through perfection to the highest realm of spirit. Its highest realm is the First Intellect which comprehended the ultimate reality, i.e., God and it represents ultimate unity between the spirit and pure reason or reason and revelation.

According to this view, points out Alam, man's earthly existence is both a tragedy and an occasion for celebration—a tragedy if he forgets his trans-historical origins and gets absorbed in history, losing his contact with eternity. The soul's travel upwards is its travel homewards till its merger with the First Intellect. The Ismailis, however, maintain that after the descent, the highest realm one can reach—through refinement and spiritualization—is only the realm of the Tenth Intellect, not the First One. It is only the Prophet and the *imams* who can reach the highest realm of the

First Intellect.

In Sufi literature, the destiny of man is to be *insan al-kamil* (Perfect Man), the actualization of the Hidden Treasure, the meeting point of history and eternity. It is the *haqiqat al-Muhammadiyah* (the reality of Muhammad and his prophethood). He is the Perfect Man. It is believed that Abdul Karim al-Jili propounded the notion of *al-Insan al-kamil*. But Alam maintains that this idea was not his innovation. Al-Farabi, much before him, was moving in the direction of unfolding this idea. He says that the philosopher-*imam* of al-Farabi is the highest gnostic being, the Khidr of the Qur'anic symbolism.

Jalal ud-Din Rumi is another distinguished name in this respect. Rumi stresses the importance of love. For him love assumes the role of mediator between the Highest Reality and man. If one is absorbed in love, the higher its degree of absorption, the nearer one will be to the Highest Reality. Also, interestingly enough, Khundmiri draws our attention to Ibn al-'Arabi's doctrine that 'Every thing that exists is the object of God's Mercy' (*kullu mawjudun marhum*) in his *Fusus al-Hikam*. According to Ibn al-'Arabi, the sufficient cause for the origination of things is Divine Compassion (*rahma*) which mediates between non-being and being. Man's nature, therefore, lies in Divine Compassion.

Thus, there is similarity of views between Rumi and Ibn al-'Arabi. While for Rumi love is the meeting point of the sensible and spiritual, for Ibn al-'Arabi it is compassion which brings about the unity of the two. Love thus mediates between the sensible and the spiritual and completely transforms the human personality.

Alam Khundmiri also discusses the problematic of the relationship of religion and modernity in his essay 'Religion and its Application to Modern Life: The Islamic Problem'. For all eastern religions, particularly Islam, this problem has emerged as a major challenge. Alam, unlike many others, does not see a basic contradiction between the two. He points out that the western world does not face this problem for it has 'an unbroken identity from its Greco-Roman past till the present moment, but the Islamic world gained a new identity after it embraced Islam. The problem of the Islamic world is to enter the new age of science without losing its identity, i.e., without renouncing its Islamic past.'

Alam is fully aware of the fact that to preserve one's identity is to

preserve one's past. Also, in Islam, the world of events (*duniya*) and the hereafter (*akhirah*) are regarded as a continuum. Together they provide human beings the opportunity for development to higher stages of reality. Alam points out that the Qur'an regards Time and History as real and believes in the irreversibility of Time. It does not encourage the idea of rebirth or the possibility of man's entry into the world of events. It believes in the law of causality so far as the world of events is concerned. It makes it obligatory to study the physical world and history of mankind. It also discourages pseudo-sciences like astrology and regards the universe as indifferent to human destiny. It also denies that there are intermediaries between God and the universe and thus makes a scientific study of the universe possible. After recounting these characteristics of Islam, he comments that 'these few points are enough to suggest that the Qur'anic spirit is not anti-scientific, it rather encourages scientific study of the universe.' Iqbal in *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* has pointed out that the Qur'anic spirit is inductive, not deductive and modern science depends on inductive thinking. The deductive method leads to speculative reasoning while inductive logic leads to the study of empirical facts.

According to the Qur'an, man is free and can act freely within the limits set by God. Life is described as 'striving in the way of God' (*jihad fi sabilillah*). One must strive in conformity with the values and the ethical vision revealed by Allah and for him the entire world is a stage of activity provided he fixes his gaze towards Allah. *Amal* is quite central to the Islamic way of life. The Prophet, through his actions transformed the whole world and made it obligatory for his followers also to continue to transform it.

It is this vision that the Muslims have to recapture if they want to live successfully in the modern world. Science deals with objects out there and Islam in no way opposes this. If Muslims today fit ill with modernity and modern science it is their fault, their failure to come to terms with the changing world.

Thus it will be seen from what is discussed above that Alam Khundmiri is a significant modern Indian Islamic thinker. Unfortunately he did not publish as much as he was capable of. His ideas deserve much wider dissemination, both in the academic as well as the non-academic world.

[1](#) T.J. de Boer, *History of Philosophy in Islam*, trans., E.R. Jones (New York: Dover Publications, 1967), p. 43.

I



I

A Critical Examination of Islamic Traditionalism with Reference to the Demands of Modernization¹

Islam is the culmination of the prophetic movement which emerged in West Asia when the non-prophetic systems of beliefs could not resolve the internal crises that resulted from a heightening of religious consciousness and reflective thinking. The proposition that with Islam the prophetic movement comes to a close is not merely an expression of faith, it is a brutal historical fact. The theological language of Islam describes it as the cessation of divine revelation to mankind and the Qur'an calls it 'completion of the Faith' (*ad-Din*). It is in the personality of Muhammad that history finds the last builder of a religion who claimed to have spoken the divine word. The phenomenology of religions reveals that each religion has its own central concept. Buddhism stresses the centrality of Dhamma, Judaism makes its central notion law, Christianity regards its fundamental idea as the divine person, and Islam gives central importance to the Book for the religious life of its community. It is not incorrect to say that Muhammad was the first prophet who introduced the idea of a religion based on the Book. If Jesus was considered the uncreated divine logos by Christian theologians, the Qur'an was regarded as the uncreated divine word by early Muslim theologians. One of the fiercest theological battles was fought on this issue in the early period of Islamic history. The Book claims that 'In it is guidance sure, without doubt, to those who fear God' (ii, 2). Theoretically, the Book enjoins upon believers to accept previous Books but theologically it means an unconditional acceptance of the Book, as it alone is the infallible word of God. Next to the Book is the personality of Muhammad, the seal of the prophets, and according to passionate believers, the best and the highest among them. The Book itself declares that

Say: If ye do love God,
Follow me: God will love you
And forgive you your sins:
For God is Oft-forgiving,
Most Merciful. (iii, 31)

The Prophet was not only the last among the prophets who in the most authentic manner communicated the ‘word of God’ but he also practised it for the benefit of mankind. And therefore the Qur’an declares:

Ye have indeed
In the Apostle of God
A beautiful pattern (of conduct)
For anyone whose hope is
In God and the Final Day,
And who engages much
In the praise of God. (xxxiii, 21)

Methodologically, it means that there are two sources of infallible truth; the Book, and the practices of the Prophet. The Prophet did not only teach the word of God, he also founded the ‘best community’ (*khayra ummatin*), the ‘model community for mankind’, one which was destined to be a ‘witness for the whole of humanity’ (*shuhada’ `ala’n-Nas*). The community became the preserver of the faith (*ad-Din*), the translator of the divine will on earth. Again, according to the majority of believers, the community remained infallible during the reign of the guided Khulafa’. Thus there are three infallible principles—the Book, the Prophet, the community—and they are complementary to each other. The Book infallibly revealed the will of God, the Prophet unerringly practised it, and the community historically preserved it. A popular *hadith* gives almost a divine status to the community by declaring that ‘My community will never agree on error’.

From another angle, the Book communicates the system of beliefs and the law, the Prophet presents a living example, and the community the way of life. Thus the Book is Islam as a system of beliefs and law, the Prophet is Islam as a person, and the community is Islam as a way of life. It is an impersonal faith, it is a personal religion, and it is a way of life. And it is in

this sense that tradition was not an accretion in Islam, but developed as an integral part of it. The three principles of the Book, the prophetic traditions (*sunna*), and the (scholarly) consensus of the community (*ijma`*), are implied in the early faith itself. These principles are the ideational foundations of Islamic tradition. Theology and legal practice added the fourth principle, *qiyas* (analogical reasoning), which however does not have any clear basis in the Book. The idea of ‘finality’ is intimately related with these principles. Islam is the final message, Qur’an is the final Book, Muhammad is the last among the prophets, and the community (*umma*) is the final *umma*, and it is through them that the divine ideal became actual.

It was not an uncommon belief that with the utterance of the ‘final word’ the purpose of divine creation itself was fulfilled. It was not a far-fetched idea for some sensitive souls that the next significant event could be the end of time alone. This gives rise to a tension between the polar concepts of history and eschatology; some of the best creative minds among historians and Sufis tried to resolve this tension. As a result of this tension, some unforeseen creative possibilities of Islam also emerged in Islamic literature. The esoteric and the exoteric aspects of Islam derive their inspiration from these fundamental principles. The Sufis explored the hidden meaning of the Book, and the aspect of *hikmat* (wisdom), so much emphasized in the Qur’an, becomes their dominant concern. The principle of the Prophet becomes for them the ‘eternal teacher’ whose ‘memory’ is recurrently re-enacted in the mind. The principle of the community gives rise to the Sufi brotherhood, devoted seekers of the truth and passionate searchers of the final vision. Theologians tried to systematize a ‘dogma’ from ‘scattered’ verses of the Qur’an and seek concrete guidance from the sayings of the Prophet. The principle of the community inspired the idea of the university, a centre of learning, and in course of time, the *`ulama* claimed to be the ‘heirs’ of the Prophet of God. The legist painstakingly developed one of the best legal systems of the old world out of the principles of the Book, the *sunna*, and the consensus of the community. The different challenges that the community was to face were resolved by a creative synthesis of these principles. It was by their aid that different elements of culture, theology, law, politics, philosophy, and Sufism were unified into an organic whole and the community could keep up its image in moments of both expansion and decay. The qualitative difference of these two moments was, however,

going to make crucial differences for subsequent generations.

In moments of expansion, the joy of expansion itself was a creative source for further expansion and the stresses and strains created by expansion and contact with different cultures provided occasions for further creativity in the field of thought and action; but at moments when internal schisms and external challenges, both political and ideological, grew in intensity, the fundamental principles of cohesion-in-expansion degenerated into forces of conservation and stagnation. The idea of finality concurrently degenerated into the illusion of finality and Islam split up into many closed systems. The point of contact between theology, law, philosophy and Sufism was lost and in course of time the subdivisions of these aspects themselves assumed a rigidity such that each one of them claimed 'finality' for themselves. The intimate relation of politics and religion in early Islam not only provided a creative occasion for the development of law into legal schools but it also conferred upon the legist a privileged position which was practically denied to other creative minds.

This tendency in early and medieval Islam made the transformation of religion into jurisprudence easier and theology itself became a subservient part of the jurisprudence. The consolidation of the four rival legal schools in Sunni Islam and the discontinuation of the principle of *ijtihad*² synchronized with the emergence of Ash`ari theology³ and the final defeat of free speculative thought. The emergence of al-Ghazali⁴ and the death of philosophical enquiry were, in a sense, symptomatic of the intellectual decay of the Islamic idea of community. The Ash`ari compromise, a part of which was al-Ghazali's reconciliation of theology and Sufism, was the final triumph of 'unreason' in the history of Islamic thought. The Qur'an claimed that it had completed the revelation and had given final guidance. Now the actual completion of the faith in all its ramifications was done by theologians and legists. The division of Islam into Sunnis and Shi`as and of the former into four legal schools having Ash`arism as their ideological basis was 'final'. It thus became the inarticulate assumption of the community that truth has been completely revealed.

Methodologically, the concept of revelation had by this time assumed an entirely different meaning. From the epistemological point of view there could be only one source of knowledge and that was the 'completed

tradition'. It further meant that there could not be any meaningful addition to knowledge, and if any such attempt was made, it was a deviation from the right path, or a heresy. It implied that knowledge is not an advancement from the known to the unknown but an application of the known and completed laws to seemingly new situations. Ontologically, it meant that the universe and the human situation are closed systems and that nothing really novel can occur. The concept of change does not only lose its ontological status, it also loses its axiological significance. It was felt that change could only be from bad to worse and it was the duty of all right-minded persons to resist change.

The identification of novelty with heresy seems to be a natural result of the illusion of finality. The approximation of knowledge with 'knowledge of the sciences of religion' meant the banishment of reason and experience from the world of man. Historically, the final triumph of theology coincides with the final defeat of scientific and philosophic reason. The acceptance of al-Ghazali's theory of knowledge and Ash'ari metaphysics of occasionalism meant a victory of not the prophetic tradition but of traditionalism in the world of Islam. In fact, the tendency to revive the prophetic tradition, which was to occupy the intellectual resources of some of the best minds in the Islamic world, was essentially a movement away from traditionalism. Ibn Taymiya⁵ represented the swing to the other side, away from the *ijma`* of the theologians and legists. In the thrilling voice of Ibn Taymiya is concealed his desperate attempt to revive the 'original' tradition of the Prophet. The traditionalism of the orthodox was at least accommodative of folk-religion. It had no doubt closed the doors of *ijtihad* in Islam but was not unprepared to accommodate the gradual *ijma`* of the community, if only it was not repugnant to the broad spirit of Islam. The 'fundamentalist' movement of Ibn Taymiya was, in a sense, completely anti-historical in its attitude to communal life. This movement was to go on to introduce one more principle of 'division' in the collective life of Islam. The Zahiris of the Ibn Hazm⁶ type were in certain respects intellectually akin to the 'fundamentalists'. Their distrust of philosophy, mysticism and reason was mutual.

With the emergence of these schools, the Islamic world was divided into the orthodox (of the Sunni and the Shi'a types) and the 'fundamentalists',

who were not prepared to accept anything unless it was sanctioned by the Book and the practice of the Prophet. Methodologically, it meant that knowledge and action should conform to two criteria, the preserved Book and tradition, which was not absolutely preserved. It further implied an equality of status between the two. It is a noteworthy fact in the history of Islamic thought that no serious theological school of Islam was satisfied with the principle that the Qur'an alone is an infallible guide. The Shi'as supplement it with the *imama*, the Sunni orthodoxy of the traditionalist type with *sunna* and *ijma`* of the community and the Sunni orthodoxy of the fundamentalist type with *sunna*.

The traditionalism of the orthodox had many things which could not by any stretch of imagination be justified by a strict adherence to the principles of the Book and *sunna*. Traditionalist Islam was gradually moving towards an unconscious acceptance of the principle of folk-religion as distinct from the religion of the élite. Besides, it was also inclined to accept the validity of an existential difference between the temporal and the religious aspects of human life. The religious thought of al-Ghazali had the seeds of an ethical theory which could claim autonomy from a strict legist interpretation of religious injunctions. The Sufi always looked beyond the legally permissible to the ethically justifiable. However, Islamic civilization lacked this perspective and its further intellectual expansion suffered much on account of the approximation of law with morality.

The dominance of legal categories in a civilization tends to retard the development of an autonomous ethical conscience. The insistence of the 'fundamentalists' on outward form and the preoccupation of the Zahiris with the 'letter' were only two aspects of the same attitude. Both these movements implied a shrinking of the intellectual horizon of the community and the impoverishment of its spiritual life. These movements did not ultimately overcome traditionalist Islam, but they made a deep impact on the community.

There was, now, one more ideal before the community in times of spiritual distress and weakened political power. The 'fundamentalist' movement gave a terrible blow to the gradual emergence of the principle of *ijma`* as a guide for the secular life of the community. This movement implied that the highest ends of the individual and the highest ends of the community must coincide with each other and that the highest end of the

latter is to enforce law in its most overt form. It revived the lure of power which was slowly dying out from the consciousness of the folk on account of Sufi teachings about a higher, spiritual life. A more humble attitude was developing in the heart of the traditionalist: seek refuge in the infinite grace of God in times of distress and spiritual strength in the face of calamities. The decline of the central authority and the corruption of politics had made a powerful impact on the religious-minded person: higher religion can survive the loss of political power. Ibn Taymiya, on the contrary, declared it a duty to consider the exercise of power a form of religion, as one of the acts by which man is drawn nearer to God. The idea implicit was that a true believer must strive for the establishment of a society and State in which the duality of power and religious life is finally overcome.

There was nothing wrong in the 'fundamentalist' ideal that political activity must strive for the realization of higher values but their insistence that higher values, embodied in a religion, have finally been institutionalized was far from their higher ideal. The same methodological error is revealed in the outlook of modern followers of Ibn Taymiya. Their guiding principle that Islam does not believe in the formal division of the secular and the religious is not theoretically untenable but what is missed is a more fundamental point: the unity of the secular and the religious can never become a completed act. Further, what Islam had meant to emphasize was the ontological unity of all existence. This sort of unity does not preclude the possibility of an existential difference between different levels of life and a further possibility of evolving plural standards for them, which are ultimately united on a higher level of unity. The ideal unity of the secular and the religious can hardly mean that political power is to be used for the instantaneous establishment of religious law. That would eventually result in the stagnation of political theory and make the religious ideal secondary to political power in its actual status. The Roman Catholic Church's control over secular power before the Reformation was an attempt at such a unification. The Hindu kingdoms of ancient India were yet another manifestation of the same attitude. The absence of the priestly class in Islam is besides the point because, in Islamic states, the *`ulama* and the legist had assumed practical authority to interpret 'law'. The only difference was in the mechanism of interpretation and the actual sources of law. One more serious loss was the fact that a proper theory of human rights could not

develop in Islamic political thought, the seeds of which were present in the Qur'an and in the sayings of the Prophet. The Christian world had to wait till the actual separation of the Church and the State for the flowering of a theory of human rights which was greatly inspired by early Christianity. The decline of the Muslim world, a serious problem for the 'fundamentalists', was explained as caused by the time-distance between the community and the golden age of the Prophet and the *Khulafa-e Rashidun*. The purpose was to make the idea of the 'golden age' an articulate aspiration of the community in its political life. The idea of a 'golden age' is an essential ingredient of religious life. However, the 'fundamentalists' picked on the 'political' as the highest moment of Islam. This gave rise to a cognitive and affective attitude which longs for and aims at the revival of that 'original past', and looks at the present as a 'fall' or a return to the pre-guidance age. And the spiritual longing of the Sufi-traditionalist theologian to approximate his life of belief and action to the exemplary life of the Prophet is given a secular orientation. Ibn Taymiya could neither reverse the historical process of political decline in his own age nor dethrone the traditionalism of contemporary Islam. History had to wait for a few more centuries to witness the enacting of the possibilities which his violent ideology had contained. He became an *imam* of the revivalists and there is hardly any revivalist who is not, at least partially, influenced by him. There were, now, two thought-patterns before the community: one of al-Ghazali and the other of Ibn Taymiya. Their mental attitudes were mutually exclusive, but the community developed an admiration for both these models of thinking.

The tension between the polar concept of piety, the ideal of the traditionalist Sufi, and power, the ideal of the 'fundamentalist', created an unhappy consciousness in the community. The community could never unhesitatingly look beyond political power as an essential element of religious life. This is true about medieval Islam and more so of post-medieval Islam. The latter is in reality a revival of the ideology preached by Ibn Taymiya. The epistemological assumptions of post-medieval Islam and its world-outlook are not different from those of medieval Islam. Post-medieval Islam is governed by the belief that tradition covers the whole of human life. It will be more accurate to state that post-medieval Islam is more preoccupied with this idea than traditionalist Islam. The assumption of

most recent Islamic movements is that the ills of present-day Muslim societies are due to the loss of political power which in turn was caused by the community drifting from the original sources of the Book and *sunna*. Even a cursory study of the ideas of Shah Waliullah, `Abdu'l-Wahhab of Najd, the later Waliullahi writers, the young Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (1888–1958), and the `ulama of Deoband indicates their preoccupation with medieval epistemology, its world-outlook and political thought. It still remains a challenging task to question the validity of the proposition that tradition covers the entire human life. A point which is common to the Nadva School (or Nadvat al-`ulama, founded in 1891) and the Jama'at-e Islami is that no aspect of human life is outside the purview of Islamic Law. It contains infallible laws for the entire life of man—whether referring to his metaphysical needs or moral aspirations, relating to secular aspects of life or greater details of state administration.

There seems to be a fatal semantic confusion between the 'infallible guidance' (*hidaya*) which the Qur'an claims to possess and the actual laws which these revivalists try to find in tradition. The proposition that a book or a religious tradition offers guidance in multiple spheres of life—apart from its being true or false—is semantically different from the proposition that they contain infallible, immutable laws involving absolute permanence for all occasions. The former proposition does not altogether deny the possibility of the emergence of novel situations in the life of the individual or the community, whereas the second proposition makes all change meaningless. It makes the different periods of historical time ontologically identical with each other and obliterates the difference between the human world and the physical universe. It is a simple mechanism expressed in religious language which chooses not to admit that there is a qualitative difference between an earthquake and a war.² This means that the present itself has no ontological status and that every event is only an occasion to vindicate tradition. This is tantamount to denying that there is any genuine history and suggests that knowledge is not the discovery of new propositions but a mere reinterpretation of older theories. It also fails to prove why another religious tradition is not equally infallible. The whole attitude behind this proposition is essentially authoritarian, the indisputable quality of the medieval mind. It has, on this account, been suggested that

most contemporary Islamic movements are a continuation of the medieval attitude. Almost all the authors of these movements emphasize the need to reinterpret tradition in accordance with the needs of modern times, without, however, suggesting a new world-outlook and a new epistemology which takes into account the progress in the field of sciences, natural as well as social, psychology and even religious phenomenology. Muhammad Iqbal is, perhaps, the only exception who made a serious attempt to examine the world-outlook of medieval Islam.

The different revivalist movements differ on the scope and range of reinterpretation. Some of them—like the Hanbalis⁸ of Saudi Arabia and the neo-Hanbalis, like the leaders of the Jama'at-e Islami—believe that the need for reinterpretation is marginal. The fundamental task of Islamic movements, according to them, is to wage a relentless war against the modern age as it is a reversal to *jahiliya* (ignorance). Others, like the early Salafiya, feel that there is a wider scope for interpretation. But the philosophical method of these schools, with their varied aims, remains medieval and scholastic because the task of the present-day thinker is again to construct a reformed *kalaam* or a modified *fiqh* which is still governed by a pre-scientific theory of knowledge. Some of the more liberal among them are keen to open the doors of *ijtihad* by taking into account modern needs. They would like to give a few concessions to modern knowledge by giving new meanings to the words and phrases in their dogma. Such attempts often leave the community bewildered and sometimes create quite an opposite effect—there is nothing new in the modern world which was not anticipated in the tradition.

The medievalists among the moderns—such as Abu'l Hasan `Alian-Nadvi (1884–1953)⁹ and the advocates of the Jama'at-e Islami—share the belief that the Islamic community is the prophetic community and that the world is ill because of its inactivity. The assumption that the world is fast moving towards destruction is an a priori of their thought. A parallel can be found in the movement of Sri Aurobindo (1872–1950) in recent Indian philosophy which also believes that the world is ill and that India, i.e., Hindu India, has a divine mission to fulfil. The world view of these medievalists is theocentric, their social thought is theocratic, and their view of history is providential. They are yet to attempt a distinction between a

knowledge of the world and the cognition of values. Recent advances in the theory of knowledge have not had any effect on their mode of thinking. Scientific theories—still examined only in the light of the word of God—are often summarily rejected.¹⁰ The theoretical basis of this attitude of examining scientific theories is a questionable proposition: religion, and in this case Islam, reveals all truths, and Islam being the final religion, has spoken the final truth. There seems to be some confusion here—the simple claim of the Qur'an is that religion or *din* has been revealed in a full and complete form by God. There is a vast semantic difference between completion of *din* and completion of all truth. The finality of revelation and the completion of *din* have certain restricted meanings beyond which they lose their relevance. It simply means that Islam is the last and the final religion of revelation and the Qur'an is the last revealed Book. In the restricted religious sphere, it gives authenticity to the revelation and also makes the religious group an authentic one. It also provides to the believer, as Iqbal has pointed out,¹¹ an authentic religious criterion and gives to religious life a definite character. The idea does not, however, entail that all truth has been spoken, neither does it give a valid criterion of truth outside the restricted field of religious knowledge. It gives something different, which may even be called higher from the point of view of values. It gives to the process of truth-finding an axiological basis. But it does not involve a rejection of any proposition belonging to the field of sciences, natural or social, because it appears contrary to the revealed word; neither does it mean a hasty attempt to adjust revelation to contemporary theories. It only means a patient and untiring search for truth, leaving the question of absolute truth outside the process of truth-seeking.

In the case of Islam, it is a soul-consuming task. Islam has a simultaneous metaphysical and social approach and both are part of the revelation. A religious thinker has to remember one important fact: religions get their distinctness on account of their metaphysical vision and it is the vision which opens further possibilities for metaphysical speculation. The history of Islamic thought in its period of intellectual expansion provides us with many examples which prove this proposition. The term 'innovation' or 'heresy' can hardly be applied to any philosophical speculation based on revealed vision. The history of philosophy itself shows that all philosophies

have one or the other vision as their presupposition. The history of western philosophy presupposes the vision of Christianity but the variety of the ways in which this vision leads to different philosophical solutions enriches the religious consciousness of the West itself. So far as metaphysical speculation is concerned, Islamic societies have been very liberal and there are a very few instances when a particular metaphysical discussion has been violently resisted. Similarly, in the field of empirical sciences, Islam in its days of intellectual expansion very infrequently suppressed a scientific school.

The real difficulty lies in the human world, where there is a greater need for free discussion. It is in this field that traditional Islam has shown signs of intolerance and a rigidity of outlook. It needs to be remembered that many questions of tradition belong to the world of man. It looks really paradoxical that the total number of verses in the Qur'an dealing with the organization of human society are not more than one-tenth of the Qur'an,¹² while the amount of traditions developed upon it are nowhere proportionate to the actual number of Qur'anic verses. It was on account of the small number of such legislative verses that the need was felt to supplement it with *sunna*, *ijma`*, and *qiyas*. The compulsions of political power gave to this department of human knowledge an importance greater than it could have in any scheme of religious knowledge. The logic of political power demands that the problem of human organization be given the highest importance and the same thing happened in Islam. It is again the logic of political power that the State and its structure be kept intact. It is on this account that there is an element of conservatism in political activity. The early Islamic State was no exception. As soon as the forces of political conservatism appeared, its whole fabric was given a religious sanction. The State being an ideological structure—this will be a less controversial term than theocratic—also took upon itself the duty of preserving the system of beliefs, so far as it could within the comprehension of the political authority.

Hence, it is not surprising that legal schools in the Sunni world were only four, whereas the number of purely dogmatic schools far exceeds the imagination of an average believer. Many terms in Islamic scholastic literature actually belong to the realm of law and politics. Even a respected

term like ‘*sunna*’ has hardly any relevance in a purely metaphysical discussion. The famous *hadith* of Mu`adh itself, which is the source of *sunna* and *qiyas* in legist literature, properly belongs to the sphere of legal decisions. The linguistic analysis of that *hadith* does not confirm the view that it was meant to be binding on all generations to come. The outcome of such a view is the commonly accepted notion, much emphasized by contemporary ‘fundamentalists’, that there can be no legislative activity in an Islamic State and that such a State has to enforce the laws already legislated by the Book or *sunna*. Similarly the view that all sovereignty belongs to God is derived from such traditions and is a misreading of the Qur’an. The semantic confusion is again evident here, for no political writer used the term ‘sovereignty’ in the same sense as it was used about God and no theist can deny that ultimate authority belongs to God. The ‘fundamentalist’ is committing the same methodological error of trying to confer finality on medieval political terminology because it appears to be religious. A detailed and dispassionate study of Islamic legal and political tradition confirms the hypothesis that there is a considerable gap between the Qur’anic vision of man and its transition into legal terms and historical institutions.

The Qur’anic approach to human problems is based on the Qur’anic vision of man as a free and morally responsible being, who has a value by himself. The ultimate fact of the human world, according to the Qur’an, is the individual who strives for perfection, suffers for it and endures this suffering with the final hope that he will have a final vision (*liqa’u-Rabbihi*). Some of the best passages of the Qur’an are those which deal with the human situation and describe the ultimate dignity of man, as the viceregent of God. The life of the Prophet itself consists of a series of actions which were the concrete translation of this vision in that historical time in which he was situated. In his own historical situation, the Prophet was sometimes guided by the ‘revelation’ but more often had to depend on his own judgement, the motive being in both cases a passionate desire to elevate human status. A mechanical interpretation of the *sunna*—the words and the deeds of the Prophet—ignores his historical situation and thus is unable to imagine the unlimited possibilities which are implied in the Qur’anic vision. The creative energies of some of the best Islamic thinkers were devoted to comprehending this vision as it was translated in the finite

historical time, mostly in the form of law. The historical reason¹³ for giving to *sunna* and *ijma* an almost equal place with the Book was because of the tendency to preserve the form that was given to human society by the Prophet, so far as it was possible in the turbulent days that followed the death of the Prophet. *It is, perhaps, peculiar to Islam that the purely contingent was confused with the essentially religious. If the contingent is raised to the level of the necessary, a philosophical error, a negation of change, an error to which attention has been drawn earlier, will be the result.* From this philosophical confusion arises the anti-scientific and anti-philosophical attitude of the conformists, particularly the neo-Hanbalis. This confusion is the real source of their resistance to the normal growth of the scientific and philosophical values which are the bases of modern civilization. 'Modernism' is a convenient term to express the unity of these values, which themselves presuppose a pluralistic view of human life, at least at its existential level. It is not a chronological term; it is a mental attitude which governs the explorative behaviour of modern man in his attempt to conquer the forces of nature in order to ameliorate the human situation. This attitude is not inconsistent with the Qur'anic vision of man. One can hardly agree with von Grunebaum that

it would be difficult to claim that the revelation tends to render man truly human and encourages him to use the forces of the physical universe as instruments of self-operation (a term which I prefer to the more static conception of 'liberty') even though such a tendency has been found by some Muslim modernists of the sacred text.¹⁴

It is not due to the mental ingenuity of the modernist that a humanist tendency has been discovered in the Qur'an; on the contrary, the Qur'anic vision of man in its totality encourages him to use the forces of the physical universe as an instrument of not only self-liberation but also self-realization. The Qur'anic account of the coming of Adam on earth itself is a revaluation of mankind in the history of sacred religious texts. To conquer and subjugate the forces of nature is an imperative of the Qur'an, and it is true that this tendency of the Qur'an was not given its proper importance by the medieval Sufi and the theologian of the inward type who were moved more by verses emphasizing the transitory character of the worldly

existence, which was only one of the moments of the Qur'an. Religion, like art, has a symbolic aspect on account of which each culture interprets it according to its own cultural horizon. The medieval terminology in which Islam is still clothed, could not grasp this very important moment of the Book. It is one of the greatest achievements of Iqbal, as has been pointed out by Dr Schimmel,¹⁵ that he made a revaluation of man, much neglected in Islamic literature. It is quite plain that religious humanism whether Qur'anic or Christian cannot be humanism without God—God being the 'beginning' and the 'end' of all religions. It will be restricting the meaning and scope of humanism if it is limited to the atheistic type or to a particular religious type, as is unfortunately done by von Grunebaum.

The example of Iqbal proves one important point to which attention has been drawn earlier, that without a new philosophic approach which takes into account the contemporary frontiers of knowledge, Islamic thought and institutions cannot meet the demands of modern times. One can hardly expect any attempt to reinterpret Islam to succeed if the basis is still medieval. Modernism as a philosophical tendency implies the view that neither the universe nor the human world is static; change has an ontological as well as an axiological status. The traditionalists and the neo-Hanbalis deny this when they widen the significance of tradition. Recent changes in the human situation demand a more humble view of infallibility. In their enthusiasm to stress the infallibility and finality of the tradition, the neo-Hanbalis actually claim infallibility for themselves and for their own knowledge of the word and the prophetic tradition. The paradox that arises out of the apparent incompatibility of the revealed word and modern knowledge, derived from humanly reliable sources of reason and experience, is not easily resolvable by an ad hoc interpretation. It is not a mere religious question; it is also an epistemological question. It cannot be resolved either by abandoning the scientific result or by throwing away the revealed word. The second approach would imply that the ideal of infallibility is transferred to science which is not its intent.

A more humble course would be to limit the relevance of the respective fields of enquiry. So far, religious men, and for the purpose of the present enquiry Muslims, were seeking guidance from religion even in matters which could easily be guided by human reason and experience. One of the

assumptions behind this attitude was that there must be one source of knowledge which could answer all our questions. Religious revelation is not the only valid source of knowledge, it is simply a source of knowledge especially suited for regions which do not usually come under the grip of dialectical reason or experience. The guidance, which revelation offers in matters suited for rational enquiry, is more of an ethical nature than of a legal character. It is after all man, the believer, who has to fix meanings to the language of revelation. It suits the nature of revelation more if meanings of a more universal character are given to the revealed word.

Qur'anic revelation uses ethical as well as legal language, and the tendency of the theologico-legal mind has been to subordinate the ethical to the legal, to ignore meaningful distinctions between the violation of legal and moral norms, not because of any lack of moral insight but because he had to study the problem from a political angle. Now, when the nature of the modern State has changed, the requirements of law have also changed. Divine law was a logical presupposition of a divine State. This change in our attitude towards the State is part of the total change which has come in the human situation. The lure of power in a religious group is inconsistent with the changed present-day outlook. This lure of politics undermines the democratic foundations of modern society if it grips a religious group. There seems to be a direct conflict between the consensus of a large proportion of humanity and the consensus of a limited number of the *'ulama* on the question of the ultimate ideal and working of a modern State. The conflict cannot be resolved by a mere mechanical adherence to a solution which was offered by a limited number of specialized scholars who lived in entirely different times, times when a theocratic State was the generally accepted norm of political activity. It only shows that religious opinion, even when guided by the best intentions, can become archaic in a field which is not properly religious. We do not find the same situation when religious judgements about the ultimate problems of existence are examined.¹⁶

Modernization, in the true sense of the term, is not possible unless this sort of totalitarian attitude towards life is finally given up. Change in mere external forms of life, without corresponding changes in intellectual attitudes, may result in a greater disaster: that of a modern technological

society with an extreme, totalitarian attitude. This is the general problem which Muslims all over the world face today. The situation in India is, however, different. The problem in India is the modernization of the majority, the Hindus, who will ultimately determine whether India is going to be a modern State or a State governed by medieval Hindu values. Indian Muslims can accelerate the process of modernization, if they accept the suggestion that the values of secular democracy are more in tune with a higher ethical ideal than futile attempts to recapture past politico-legal traditions which are neither in tune with modern times nor can be shared by their contemporaries belonging to different faiths. Indian society can only be modernized on the basis of a value system which can be shared by all its members and such a value system can emanate from the humanistic tradition of the contemporary world alone.

[1](#) One of the assumptions of this article is that modernity is a new term and that it is to be distinguished from contemporaneity. Sometimes, things which have no moral right to exist, persist, and things which have a moral right to exist and grow, are suppressed. It is, I think, a peculiarity of the human situation and hence, in a fruitful discussion about the human situation, axiology can be entirely eliminated. My other contention is that terms particularly relating to the human situation are not discovered, they are coined. The coinage of a term itself sometimes introduces a change in human reality.

[2](#) Editor's note: *ijtihad*, 'effort' or 'investigative reasoning', is an independent or original interpretation of problems not precisely covered by the Qur'an, *hadith* and *ijma`*. *Mujtahids* are qualified jurists who exercise the right to such original thinking, through personal judgement and analogical reasoning. After the reign of the Abbasids, the Sunnis were of the opinion that *ijtihad* was no longer possible and that subsequent generations were bound to *taqlid*, the unquestioned acceptance of precedents. The Shi'as, on the other hand, differed. Later Sunni scholars like Ibn Taymiya and Jalal ud-Din as-Suyuti declared themselves to be *mujtahids*, and, also in recent times, various Muslim thinkers have called for the re-instatement of *ijtihad* as a requirement of modern life.

In India, the theologian Shah Waliullah or Waliyullah (1702–62) is regarded as the founder of modern Islamic thought. He held religious ideas to be universal and eternal, though their application could meet different circumstances, and allowed *ijtihad* in order to reassess Islamic theology in the light of modern changes. His most important work is *Asrar ad-Din* ('The Secrets of Belief'). The theological position of the Deoband school (a leading Muslim theological centre founded in 1867 by Muhammad 'Abid Husain in Uttar Pradesh) has always been heavily influenced by Shah Waliullah as

also the early nineteenth-century Wahhabiya school.

[3](#) Editor's note: Founded by al-Ash`ari (d. 935/936), this tradition presents the Qur'an and the teachings of the Prophet as a contingency of the world dependent upon the deliberate action of a transcendent creator. This view has also been called 'occasionalistic': whatever exists and is not eternal, God creates, and its existence is his action. Causal action proceeds from a living, willing, powerful agent, not as the necessary consequence of an existent's nature or essence. Al-Ash`ari was born in Basra, which was one of the main intellectual centres of Iraq. Though he joined the Mu`tazilites, as evidenced by his *Maqalat al-Islamiyin* ('Theological Opinion of the Muslims'), at the age of forty he turned away from them to a more traditional approach and even attacked his earlier teacher. His later position is exemplified in *Kitab al-Luma* or 'The Luminous Book'. His last works include the treatise *Ibanah`an usul ad-diyana* or 'Statement on the Principles of the Religion' which contains the passages venerating the memory of Ibn Hanbal.

[4](#) Editor's note: Al-Ghazali (d. 1111), religious thinker, lawyer, Ash`arite theologian, mystic and epistemologist. He critiqued philosophy severely, particularly the work of Ibn Sina and al-Farabi whom he denounced as infidels in his *Tahafut al-Falasifa* ('The Inconsistency or Incoherence of the Philosophers'). His greatest work *Ihya` 'ulum ad-din* ('The Revival of the Religious Sciences') explains the doctrines and practices of Islam and shows how these can be made the basis of a deeply devotional life, leading to the higher stages of Sufism. He soon put this to practice, abandoning his career as a professor, disposing off his wealth and adopting the life of a poor Sufi, the reasons for which are set forth in his *al-Munqidh min ad-dalal* or 'Deliverance from Error'. The relation between mystical experience and other forms of cognition is discussed in his *Mishkat al-anwar* ('The Niche for Lights'). His other works include *Maqasid al-falasifah* ('The Aims of the Philosophers'), *al-Mustasfa* ('Choice Part or Essentials'), *al-Iqtisad fi al-i`tiqad* ('The Just Mean in Belief) and *Nasihat al-muluk* ('Counsel for Kings').

Western scholars have paid special attention to al-Ghazali, even to the extent of ignoring other important Islamic thinkers. Alam Khundmiri also engages widely with al-Ghazali; see, particularly, 'Al-Ghazali's Repudiation of Causality' in this volume.

[5](#) A crusader against all trends of innovation, an enemy of the division of Islam into four legal sects and an opponent of the inward intuitive experience of the Sufi.

Editor's note: Ibn Taymiya (d. 1328), a jurisconsult, theologian and a member of the Pietist school founded by Ibn Hanbal. Very early in his life, he came into conflict with local authorities for protesting over a religious sentence passed against a Christian accused of insulting the Prophet. Thereafter his life, until his death in prison, was marked by persecutions and imprisonments, one after the other, for alleged anthropomorphism (ascribing human characteristics to God), for contemptuous criticism of dogmatic theology, for accusing the second Caliph, `Umar, and the fourth Caliph, Ali, of having made mistakes, for denouncing visits to tombs (including visits to the tomb of

Muhammad) and the worship of saints. His important works include *As-Siya-sat ash-shariyah* ('Treatise on Juridical Politics') and *Minhaj as-sunnah* ('The Way of Tradition'). Ibn Taymiya denounced the monism of Ibn al-'Arabi and sought the return of Islamic religion to its sources; he is also regarded as the inspiration for the mid-eighteenth-century Wahhabiya as well as the nineteenth-century Salafiya movements. Denounced by many as a heretic responsible for a decay in Islamic philosophy and science, Taymiya is also admired by many others who draw inspiration from him for a revival of a 'pure Islam'.

[6](#) Editor's note: Ibn Hazm (d. 1064), theologian and man of letters, submitted human action exclusively to the word of God. This literalism—people are bound to obey only the law of God in its *zahiri* or literal sense, without restrictions, additions or modifications—frees human beings from any choice. The followers of this school are known as the Zahiris. Apart from works on jurisprudence, logic, history, ethics, comparative religion and theology, he wrote *Tawq al-hamamah* ('The Ring of the Dove').

[7](#) It connotes that there can be a theistic mechanism as well as an atheistic theology, for example, communism.

[8](#) Editor's note: A strict traditionalist school inspired by Ibn Hanbal (d. 855), whose unflinching courage and unflinching spirit in resisting the inquisition inspired by Mu'tazilites is legendary. Ibn Hanbal is well-known for inspiring interest in *fiqh* (Islamic law and jurisprudence); his most important work is *Musnad*, a compilation of the traditions of the Prophet Muhammed.

Popular in Iraq and Syria in the fourteenth-century, the school was revived in the eighteenth-century through the Wahhabi movement. The Wahhabiya movement was founded by Muhammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab of central Arabia and adopted by the Najd-based tribe led by Muhammed Ibn Sa'ud in 1774; members of this school call themselves *al-Muwahhidun* or 'Unitarians'. They stress the unity or absolute oneness of God (*tawhid*) and deny all acts implying polytheism, such as visiting tombs and venerating saints.

Like the eighteenth-century Wahhabiya reform movement, the Salafiya, a nineteenth-century Egyptian movement rooted in tradition, also claims Ibn Taymiya as its inspiration. The Salafiya advocated the continued supremacy of Islamic law but with fresh interpretations to meet the community's changing needs. The interpretations are, however, to be in tune with an ideal time in history, that of the *salaf* or 'pious ancestors' in the early Islamic state of Muhammad and his companions.

[9](#) Editor's Note: Sayyid Abu'l Hasan 'Ahi an-Nadvi, also Nadvi or Nadwi (b. 1914), closely associated as student, teacher and administrator with the Nadwat al-'Ulama (founded in 1894) and its school of learning, Dar al-'Ulum, is considered an ideologue of Islamic revivalism, with a firm disavowal of 'popular' forms of Islamic beliefs, and Shi'a influences. For an assessment of his critique of Arab nationalism, see, Muhammad Qasim Zaman, 'Arabic, the Arab Middle East, and the

Definition of Muslim Identity in Twentieth Century India', *The Royal Journal of Asiatic Society*, third series, vol. 8, Part I (April 1998), pp. 59–81.

[10](#) This situation is not peculiar to Islamic societies alone; there are still some Church authorities in the Roman Catholic world who consider the theory of evolution as irreconcilable with Church dogma. As this is not a dominant attitude in western societies, it can be considered an exception. The situation is entirely opposite in the pre-scientific societies of the East.

[11](#) Muhammed Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934; Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 1994).

[12](#) Editor's note: Jalal ud-Din as-Suyuti's (d. 1505), author of *Itqan fi`ulum al-Qur'an* ('Mastery in the Sciences of the Qur'an'). His works number at least 300, many of which are booklets while some others are encyclopaedic, like the philological *Al-Muzhir fi`ulum al-lughah* ('Guide to the Sciences of Language').

[13](#) I use the phrase in the sense in which Dilthey uses it in his philosophy of history. See H.A. Hodges, *The Philosophy of Wilhelm Dilthey* (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1952).

[14](#) Gustave E. von Grunebaum, *Modern Islam: The Search for Cultural Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), p. 51.

[15](#) Annemarie Schimmel, *Gabriel's Wing: A Study of the Religious Ideas of Sir Muhammad Iqbal* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1963).

[16](#) An interesting example of the split personality of a religious group is the attitude of Abu'l Hasan `Ali an-Nadvi and the Nida'-e Millat group on the question of a secular state. This group advocates an absolute Islamic State in Islamic countries and demands complete secularism in politics so far as India is concerned. It is a real paradox that they are not prepared to give the same right to their Hindu counterparts.

God—The Contemporary Debate: The Islamic Perspective

The intimate relationship between philosophic speculation and theological polemics in the intellectual history of Islam is a significant aspect of Islamic intellectual culture. Even a cursory glance at the history of ideas in Islam reveals that the three-fold relational structure—represented by man's relation to nature, his relation with other men, and his relation with transcendence, which are the crucial issues of philosophical anthropology—ultimately rests on God and is subsumed under the man-God relationship.

This relationship has been variously presented through the 'I-thou', the 'I-it', and the 'I-i' patterns, the first term in this relation, 'I', invariably being the subject of subjects, the most exalted and the highest being. Even if the I-thou relation is the most primordial one in any meaningful religious discourse, the other two cannot be ruled out as being merely contradictory to this primordial one, since the I-thou pattern itself presupposes the transcendence of God. This pattern or model involves some sort of dialectical tension between transcendence and immanence since without this tension the I-thou relation cannot assume the form of intersubjectivity. Here, 'I' and 'thou' are subjects, and since it presents a dialogical relation, 'I' and 'thou' may be conceived as being interchangeable. Their interchangeability gives rise to the mystico-religious consciousness. The uneasy synthesis of such an instance of religious consciousness may create a situation of pathos and since only great souls can live in a condition of permanent pathos, a transition from the I-thou to I-it relation appears as a resolution of this situation of pathos. When the majesty and transcendence of God overpowers the finite subject 'i', this possibility turns into a necessity, for finite human consciousness and the I-thou relation may get

transformed into what Hegel calls a master-slave relationship, an instance of man completely submitting to the all-powerful will of God and permanently accepting for himself a lower position, that of an object in the order of being.

The tension and the pathos is resolved by accepting for himself the status of the 'it', a mere object of the divine will. While this solution offers an 'exit' from a painful and uneasy consciousness of a dialogical situation, it negates the most significant moment of religious consciousness, its 'ecstatic' character. Man, as he lives in the world of men and aspires for transcendence, seeks communication and also communion. It is on this account that the I-it relation passes into I-i communication. In this situation, the alienated consciousness involved in the I-it relation seeks refuge in the loving embrace of a God who is not only a symbol of power but also of love. In God, as Paul Tillich points out, 'Love and Power are identical which leads to the ontological unity of Love and Power.'¹ In the Islamic context, it comes close to the dynamic concept of love in Rumi² and in the work of the contemporary poet-philosopher of the Indian subcontinent, Muhammad Iqbal.

In this relationship, submission to an external authority which was implied in the I-it relation is sublimated into a joyful surrender; the 'I' aspires to rise higher in the order of being by collecting all its finite resources to participate in the infinite. Herein lies the possibility of the I-i relation rising higher, through the mediation of love, to a sublime one of the I-I.

These three models, as characterized by the above discussed relations, find their place in varying degrees in the history of Islamic religious consciousness. The first model (I-thou) can be described as the prophetic model, the second (I-it) as the theological and the third (I-i) as the mystical.³ The history of religious consciousness in Islam reveals that in each moment a nostalgic feeling for the prophetic moment lurks at a deeper level and gives importance to the 'principle of the Prophet'. He occupies the most pre-eminent position in the creaturely order, the manifest (*al-Zahir*) aspect of the 'hidden' (*al-Batin*).⁴

However, the pre-eminent position that the Prophet occupies in Islamic religious consciousness is not because he is considered God-like but simply

because he is the living symbol of ‘servitude’ (*`abdiyyah*), the one who relates himself to God as his servant. Even in moments of the highest ecstasy, he remembers his station in the world order. The Qur’an itself describes him as ‘His servant’ when referring to the highest moment of the Prophet’s life, the ‘ascension’ (*Mi`raj*).⁵ Both mystics and the mystically inclined theologians, perhaps with the exception of the literalists (*Zahiriya*), would agree with Schuon that though ‘all avatarism is foreign to Islam, nevertheless cannot but attribute to the prophetic quality of its Revealer a unique Virtue’.⁶

Within the context of our present discussion, the unique position of the Prophet brings into focus the transcendence of God and the possibility of ‘intimacy’ with the highest being, who has been aptly described as the ‘light of the heavens and the earth’.⁷ The metaphor of light is the symbol of the reconciliation of the conflicting aspects of transcendence and immanence. There is, of course, a perpetual tension between these two polar concepts in the Book. However, it appears the intention of the revelation and the revealer was not to resolve it since this tension—to use the expression of Marcel, a contemporary existentialist philosopher—is not a problem but a mystery that can be intellectually solved. It is in the nature of the ‘mysterious’ to open up newer possibilities of understanding, understandings in which one need not negate the other but, on the contrary, may help the inquirer to reach the ‘all-encompassing Being’.⁸ Though this being is nearer to us than our jugular vein, he still eludes the possibilities of our logical understanding since he is neither perceptible nor, in the ordinary sense of the term, an object of our knowledge.

Once it is conceded that there is a recurring tension between transcendence and immanence, the history of Islamic speculative theology may be viewed as that of an unresolved conflict. The resolution of this conflict would mean the cessation of all theological speculation, and the word of the theologian would become the final utterance of God. The fact that the Prophet himself did not resolve this conflict opened up diverse possibilities for their unfolding in history.

It is in this context that Islamic religious tradition had never been a monolithic one but represents a plurality of approaches. What binds them together is the idea of Allah as a unique being who does not altogether

exclude the possibility of some sort of intimacy with the creaturely order. Allah's 'concern' for man may be called the core principle of the prophetic revelation, which can also be called the ultimate horizon of Islamic religious consciousness. This horizon is not a fixed one, as the spatial metaphor suggests, but, on the other hand, represents the dynamic situation of the 'viewer'. Sometimes the horizon expands, sometimes it appears to shrink, and, at other moments, it is illuminated, opening up new possibilities. It has to be noted that what could be called the cumulative tradition of the community of seekers shows a tendency of passing beyond itself.

It is in this sense that the present discussion assumes a hermeneutic dimension. Discussing the art of hermeneutics, particularly in relation to the written word which includes the Scriptures, Dilthey observes that all exegesis completes its task up to a certain point and thus all understanding remains only relative and can never be completed.⁹ This suggests that each historical age understands the Scriptures according to its needs. The word 'needs' includes spiritual and temporal aspirations as well as the prejudices of an age. In this context, the word 'prejudice' includes the dominant myths of the age, and has a positive aspect also. The dominant myths are, in most cases, products of the horizon of experience of a given age. The horizon of an age is inclusive of its past and as Gadamer points out, there is no more an isolated horizon of the present than there are historical horizons.¹⁰

Theological discussions on God take place in a certain historical setting and an understanding of the Scriptures presents a tension between it and a situation. Since a situation is born out of human concerns, the introduction of this principle leads us to an important element of the religious consciousness of an age: the concept of man in that age. God is a response to the mode of consciousness which may be termed 'transcendence'. This mode of consciousness has an ontological dimension which is rooted in the being of man, *Dasein*, and hence the question of the existence and non-existence of God becomes secondary. The only alternative to God is a secular utopia, but since utopia lies in the 'future', it flows, in a sense, from 'eternity'.

If transcendence is a human need, stripped of its medieval terminology, the ontological dimension has an existential relevance. It is man's

affirmation of the necessity of God and of his own finite, contingent existence. Hence, in the Islamic context, Ibn Sina's concepts of the 'necessary' and the 'possible' orders of being become a landmark in the philosophy of religion.¹¹ The necessary being does not exclude the possible order of existence; on the contrary, it confers upon the possible an ontological status. In other words, the order of the possible is rooted in the necessary being. Such a doctrine presupposes a concept of man, who, though contingent, has a place in the order of being, or, what Lovejoy calls, the 'Chain of Being'.

This interpretation of the possible is implied in Ibn Sina's description of the possible orders of being as possible by themselves, which means that they are actual and real and in fact ultimately exist on account of their relation to the necessary being. Being possible by themselves also implies that such beings, though contingent, are free; their cause lies ultimately in the necessary being who may also be described in the language of Paul Tillich as the ground of being. The real significance of Ibn Sina's doctrine lies in the fact that he represents the expanding horizon of human knowledge during his time. The problem of God and his relation to man is taken seriously, and man is not relegated to the background as a mere 'nothing'.

Revelation as the spoken word is addressed to man and hence is the disclosure of God's intention. Ibn Sina's other idea, that the spoken word consists of symbols and living images of the things of the world which are intelligible to mankind, opens up new possibilities for exegesis. The intuitive moment in the Prophet's life can also be described as an 'illuminated moment', when holy reason becomes operative'.¹² It is the moment when eternity touches time. This prophetic moment may be called the state when 'reason' unites with itself in an intuitive situation, which, in the words of Paul Tillich, is a 'theonomous situation'; reason actualizes itself in obedience to its structural laws and in the power of its own inexhaustible ground. Paul Tillich, very significantly, names this state 'ecstatic reason' which appears only in a revelatory situation.¹³

The prophetic consciousness in this state does not look down upon history but, as Ibn Sina points out, the Prophet as a law-giver enters into the world of history and mediates between time and eternity. The Prophet as a

law-giver translates his moral vision into definite linguistic forms in order to turn the attention of the people to the real source of law. Ibn Sina is unambiguous on this point that prophecy has a socio-historical function. The mystic prefers detachment from the world,¹⁴ the Prophet as a law-giver proposes to change the course of events. Man, being social by essence, needs an order, an organization, and a prophet gives to human society a 'direction'.¹⁵

Ibn Sina, like his predecessor al-Farabi,¹⁶ gives primary importance to the social and political role of the Prophet,¹⁷ such that prophetic revelation becomes distinct from mystic intuition. It is a significant point that both these philosophers were not averse to mystical consciousness. Had the full implications of their doctrines of prophecy been worked out by later generations of theologians, a radical hermeneutics would have emerged. The counter-offensive of al-Ghazali, however, in the direction given by al-Ash`ari, changed the course of theological reflection. If the two aspects of *tremendum* and *fascinosum* were being synthesized by al-Farabi and Ibn Sina, the Ash`arite offensive overemphasized the *tremendum* in a manner that man was completely drowned in the ocean of the infinite power of the divine. The Ash`arite doctrine of occasionalism, though a grand piece of theological speculation, leaves no room for human freedom.¹⁸

Since the Ash`arite theological position assumed a dominant theological position in the Sunni Islamic world, and is still the dominant one, it can be termed as a quasi-permanent theological horizon. Al-Ash`ari's theology was not simply a negative response to the Mu`tazilites'¹⁹ ontological position on the identity of divine essence and attributes, and the assertion of human freedom and responsibility, but also points to a historical crisis in so far as the God-man relationship is concerned. The Ash`arites' position can be summed up as the assertion of man's nothingness before an omnipotent God. However, they failed to synthesize the dialectical tension between being and nothingness on the one hand, and divine will and human freedom on the other, probably because they could not discover the point of intersection between eternity and time, or, in other words, the unconditional being of God and the contingent order of becoming. They also failed to realize that since the contingent order flows from being, becoming too has an element of necessity in the ontological sense, which alone makes

becoming a 'Sign of God',²⁰

Could not man be conceived as located at such a point of inter-section between being and nothing? In the Islamic context, this question can be answered in the affirmative only if God is conceived as the fullness of being and nothingness in a rather relative sense. However, in the Sufi-gnostic vision of Ibn al-`Arabi,²¹ the greatest synthesizer of Sufism in Islam, the notion of mediation finds its full expression. In his *Fusus al-Hikam*, he declares 'Everything that exists is blessed' (*kullu mawjudin marhumun*).²² According to Ibn al-`Arabi, the cause behind the origination of things is divine compassion (*Rahmah*) which mediates between non-being and being; from the fullness of being, being alone proceeds. This means that man's nature (*mahiyyah*) lies in divine compassion. As man's being is the theophany of God in his aspect of compassionate being (*Rabb*), it is incumbent upon man to show compassion to others. Divine compassion is immanent in the order of existence and in the structure of the cosmos.

Ibn al-`Arabi notes that 'when compassion arises in you and through you, show it to others. You are at once compassionate (*rahim*) and the object of compassion (*marhum*) and that is how essential unity with God is achieved'. In the words of H. Corbin, this scheme results in a serious situation—without the Godhead (*Haqq*), which is the cause of being, and equally without the creature (*khalq*). In other words, without us, reality (*Haqq*) would be neither *Haqq* nor *Rabb* (the Godhead would be neither the divine nor the sovereign lord).²³ Man being the theophany of God, he is the highest form of being, he is the microcosm in the mirror of whose being all the perfections of the macrocosm reflect themselves. It is on this account that he deserves to be designated as the viceregent of God.²⁴

This theosophic concept of man leads Ibn al-`Arabi to the concept of the 'perfect man', the universal man or the logos.²⁵ The perfect man represents the total theophany: it is in him that all the perfections of being, rational, spiritual and corporeal, are united. The highest manifestation of the perfect man is the Prophet of Islam; in a more precise sense, the trans-historical reality of Muhammad.

This theosophic description of the Godhead and man was, perhaps, the highest point that Islamic speculation could reach. Rumi, in his poetic expression, describes the destiny of man as divine majesty. A detailed study

of Ibn al-`Arabi and Rumi leads to the conclusion that man could reach this destination through ecstatic love (*`ishq*). Love mediates between the sensible and the spiritual and results in a complete transformation of the human personality. It is the ecstatic love expressed by the martyr Sufi Mansur al-Hallaj²⁶ which makes the intersection of the divine and the human possible. Since the idea of the complete extinction of the finite human personality in the ocean of infinity is not acceptable in Islamic religious consciousness, the experience of 'union' can best be termed as intersection and then separation. Even granting the higher principle of ontological unity, 'otherness' has to be maintained at the existential level. In a sense, the complete obliteration of 'otherness' does not necessarily create a permanent chasm between God and man; on the contrary it inspires the finite individual to overcome it and seek 'communication' with God, without severing the self from the world of man.

This concern for the human self as a unique and yet finite human personality, and the common world of such other unique persons, separates culturally the contemporary world from the medieval. The fundamental question for medieval man was salvation and not freedom or self-transcendence, and since he lived in a theocentric age his concern was exclusively with God and not with man. Hermeneutically speaking, the contemporary religious situation demands a study of the Scripture in the light of its concerns. It also demands that its concerns ought not to be excluded from the religious realm. Each age has done it, and therefore there is nothing shocking if this demand is made today. The severance of human existential concerns from the religious realm might result in a greater paradox—unlimited secularization, a process which makes God an irrelevant principle. It makes the prophetic revelation an archaic mode of feeling and cognition and thus creates a hiatus between the past and the present of mankind.

The Islamic religious situation demands a synthesis between its historical and trans-historical dimensions. The revelatory situation in Islam itself is a meeting point or a junction of these polar aspects. Revelation as the 'spoken word' occurred at a certain historical juncture and yet it was not a mere 'temporal' event. As the 'disclosure' of divine intention, it is trans-historical, but being an occurrence in historical time, it is intimately related

to the prophetic personality and his intentions which bind together eternity and time. Revelation, in so far as its transcendental source is concerned, lies in eternity; yet its possibilities are not exhausted in time. Such being the case, historical time is not only not irrelevant, but it has an immense existential significance.

No exegesis being final, newer and newer possibilities of meaning are disclosed at each historical juncture. Finality, an essential element of any authentic revelation, does not negate the possibility of any fresh interpretation of revelation. The principle of finality means that such new meanings and interpretations do not themselves claim finality, and this precisely was what the medieval mind claimed. It may be called one of the basic elements of hermeneutic efforts that the interpreter is himself subject to historicity. This process of periodic interpretation of the Scripture indicates that human reason too has a revelatory function, though in a relative sense.

How a new world of meaning is discovered is itself a problem of historical understanding and is related to the 'dialectic of historical time'. Historical time itself being a process which binds together the past and the present with a future, it works teleologically in the sense that what is disclosed was immanent in the past situation. Paul Tillich has made an interesting observation: 'It is a familiar event in the history of philosophy that a special philosophy opens one's eyes to a special problem which was not unknown to the former philosophers but which was not the centre of their attention'.²⁷ Further, he adds, the movement of human thought is guided by the intensity with which old problems are seen in a new light and brought out of a peripheral significance to a central one.

In the Qur'anic context, it means that a particular meaning assigned to a cluster of words in a certain historical age does not exhaust all the possibilities of meaning. A pertinent question arises in this context: should one understand the words of the Book in the manner in which the contemporaries of the Prophet understood it? Such being the case in current exegetic literature, the question is a crucial one. They too had their historical horizon which could not remain fixed forever. At an early stage of Islamic religious culture, there arose a tension between prophetic consciousness and the level of understanding of the age. Religious

language, having a certain level of ambiguity, makes a multidimensional approach possible. This ambiguity does not represent a deficiency of linguistic resources of the ultimate speaker or the revealer, but an invitation to successive generations of believers to use their reason and intuition to comprehend the inexhaustible world of meanings of the divine intention. To consider that the divine intention revealed through the spoken word has a fixed meaning implies the finitude of the speaker himself. This being the case, communicative competence and the performance of finite human beings expand according to their needs.

This discussion has an immense significance in the context of Islam, since the 'word' did not become 'flesh' in this tradition. It was revealed and communicated as 'word'. Since in the Qur'anic context the passage of time does not represent a source of evil or depravity but a 'Sign of God', it means that the change of idiom in each age itself represents a sign of God. When we venture to discuss the contemporary age in so far as Islam is concerned, we find a very thin line dividing the present from the past, for which the reason has to be sought in history. As a contemporary Indian Islamic philosopher perceptively puts it:

Unfortunately Islam's theology is only a system worked out in the past and it is far from being that dynamic living process which we find in Christianity. Consequently, though we may talk of a crisis in Christian theology we cannot say the same of Muslim theology which has not yet felt the need of any reformulation of its own basic positions, consistent with the changes of times.^{[28](#)}

It will be too naïve to presume that no crisis situation exists in the theological structure of Islam, handed down to the present from its past. It is quite reasonable that so long as the world of Islam, particularly in the intellectual realm, remained stagnant, Ash'arism and its philosophical consequence, al-Ghazali's occasionalism, served the needs of the community. Changes did occur in the nineteenth-century; the most important change was man's relationship with nature. A change in this relationship necessitated a review of the relation with 'transcendent reality', God.

Awareness of this changed relationship came as a shock to the

nineteenth-century Islamic world. It did not have the conceptual tools to meet this challenge. The first phase of a changing awareness was represented as a search for new tools and the second—which is still going on—is that of a reconstruction of theology. There was an awareness that the Islamic world must change itself. The Qur’anic verse: ‘Verily never will God change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves’,²⁹ becomes a guiding principle for the reformers of the nineteenth-century. The most remarkable activist and thinker who became acutely conscious of the need for change was al-Afghani.³⁰ He realized that the dominant theological attitudes had weakened the activist impulse among Muslims.³¹ Trained as he was in the rich Shi’a philosophical and theological tradition, he turned towards Ibn Sina for spiritual guidance. Since his interests and concerns were more of a practical nature, he revived Ibn Sina’s doctrine of prophecy. He believed that prophecy has a practical function and that the Prophet is sent to establish and maintain a ‘virtuous society’, clearly a revival of al-Farabi’s position which he discussed in his treatise *al-Madinat al-Fadulah* (‘The Virtuous Society’). However, there is an important distinction between al-Afghani and al-Farabi. Al-Farabi believed that the *imam*, a prototype of Plato’s philosopher-king, could alone maintain the virtuous society, his utopian dream. Al-Afghani had no such clear notion about the ‘agent’.

Al-Afghani also agrees with Ibn Sina that the Book uses symbolic language, which human reason can only gradually comprehend. On the question of God, he is not very eloquent; he believes in the simple formulation of God’s transcendence and considers it the core principle of Islam. He has, however, nothing new to offer on the theological problem regarding transcendence and man’s relation with the transcendent being. On this second and the more important problem, he believes in human freedom and responsibility, without of course relating it to divine transcendence. In explaining human responsibility, he interprets *Qadar* (Destiny) in almost complete non-conformity to the Shi’a doctrine which implies that all things in the universe happen by the sequence of cause and effect, and God is the first cause who initiates the whole chain, leaving room for secondary causes. As he was trained in the scholastic tradition, it is no wonder that al-Afghani does not feel any need to explain and interpret the fact of felt

freedom, which could initiate a discussion on human autonomy and relate it to man's finitude.

There is no doubt about al-Afghani's dissatisfaction with the existing theological situation; his favourite theme was that Islam needs a Luther.³² Had he been acutely conscious of the crisis situation at the deeper levels of Islamic spiritual life, he could have, at least, initiated the Lutheran task. Activist as he was, without a philosophical foundation for activism, he could only assert his personality in the contemporary Islamic world.

Similar was the case with his disciple Muhammad `Abduh who seems to have been more interested in the social and moral aspects of religion than in controversial subjects like divine transcendence and its relation to the existential aspects of the human situation. `Abduh's famous treatise, *Risalat al-Tawhid*,³³ is a re-statement of classical doctrines, and a reformulation of theological issues. It is hardly possible to place him in any traditional school, either Mu'tazilite or Ash'arite, or the philosophical school of classical Islam. He believes in divine transcendence, but leaves the question of God's attributes unresolved, since he believes that they lead the believer to mere speculation. He believes in human freedom, freedom to reflect, freedom to seek rational evidence for faith, and moral freedom, but again he is not able to provide a coherent philosophical basis for his assertions. *Risalah* is more a manifesto than a systematic treatise.³⁴

It is really unfortunate that the best theological minds of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries failed to raise fundamental theological questions, and even when they raised them, the answers were too simplistic. They could initiate a debate on moral, social and political issues, without relating them to theology. Al-Afghani was in a better position to raise the debate as he had access to medieval Iranian Islamic philosophic speculations. Had he made Mulla Sadr ud-Din Shirazi, known as Mulla Sadra,³⁵ his starting point, he could have possibly initiated a lively debate in Islamic theology. This sixteenth-century philosophic genius of Islam remains unrivalled in the later world of Islam, but since his impact remained confined to Iran till this century,³⁶ his system could not replace the traditional schools of the Ash'arites and the fundamentalist preoccupations of the medieval theologian Ibn Taymiya. However, al-Afghani could not rise above the theological tradition, possibly because his

chief concerns were not theological, but moral and political. Theology, to be authentic, does not and should not leave aside the problems of community, but has to relate them to a more comprehensive global structure. This sort of global unity would be achieved if the concerns for community are related to the existential concerns of man and facts of historical temporality are brought into the orbit of human destiny. In other words, it means that the three-fold structure of man's relation to the world, his relation to other men, and his relationship with transcendence has to be brought into a unified field of experience. It represents a unity of the philosophic speculation, sociological orientation and mystical experience. An authentic theology represents such a unified field.

Al-Afghani, Muhammad `Abduh and their contemporary Syed Ahmed Khan of India also failed in evolving such a unified theology. They kept their concerns separated from each other. They were propelled by the idea and the passion that the age demanded a new orientation, but either lacked a deeper religious sensibility or a broader philosophical perspective. The mystical was also not part of their concerns and this fact is surprising because all three were also trained in the mystical way. Syed Ahmed Khan's passion to bring science and religion closer landed him in a deistic position, and in the ultimate analysis God was almost banished from his religious consciousness, mostly due to his heavy reliance on the nineteenth-century notion of strict causality, borrowed from Rudolf Karl Bultmann (1884–1976). His most noted expression, conformity or correspondence between the 'word of God' (the Book) and the 'work of God' (Nature) can be interpreted either as the naturalization of God or the deification of nature.³⁷ Syed Ahmed Khan's de-mythologization programme, which is expressed in his exegesis of the Qur'an, can hardly be compared with that of Rudolph Bultmann, for whom this meant an existential interpretation of the Gospel and the Christian tradition. Bultmann intended to understand and interpret 'myth' in the light of an existential philosophic anthropology. Syed Ahmed, on the other hand, wanted to explain away myth because he saw it as contrary to contemporary science. Eventually this programme resulted in a complete negation of 'mystery' in the Scripture. Myth originates from human 'existence' but mystery is an integral element of the entire order of existence. In this background, his contribution to the discussion on God is

mostly prosaic and betrays a tragic absence of genuine religious sensibility. Ultimately Syed Ahmed's mistake was to impose the limits and also the possibilities of physical science upon human knowledge.

It is from this background that Muhammad Iqbal emerged as the most outstanding philosopher and poet-theologian, and was the first Muslim thinker to re-channel Islamic thought. Instead of offering an apology for what the elders had said, Iqbal introduced new categories, making a bold attempt to reconstruct Islamic religious thought on hitherto unrecognized principles. It is only with Iqbal that global consciousness mirrors itself in contemporary Islamic thought. Islamic thought comes of age with his endeavour to offer an integral consciousness which does not stop merely at science or the so-called religion, supposed to be the antithesis of religion, but which embraces all the reflective and existential concerns of man.

The new categories which Iqbal introduced in his *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* can be summed up as 'personality', 'time and duration', 'becoming human finitude and autonomy', 'destiny' and 'creative advance of nature'. He endeavours to synthesize them and offer a unified view of reality. His starting point is the nature of thought. According to him,

thought is the whole in its dynamic self-expression, appearing to the temporal vision as a series of definite specifications which cannot be understood except by a reciprocal reference. Their meaning lies not in their self-identity, but in the larger whole of which they are the specific parts. This larger whole is, to use the Qur'anic metaphor, a kind of 'Preserved Tablet' which holds up the entire undetermined possibilities of knowledge as a present reality, revealing itself in serial time as a succession of definite concepts appearing to reach a unity which is already present in them.^{[38](#)}

Thus thought expressed in its dynamic movement, and reality revealing itself in the process of thought, are not fundamentally two separate realities nor is reality a mere appearance of thought. Both of them, while retaining their separate identities at the existential level, unite as two aspects of the same process at the highest unitive level which reveals itself to man at an intuitive moment, whose nature is essentially different from temporal

moments. This synthetic unitive nature of reality is the fundamental concept of Iqbal. It also means that ‘thought is capable of reaching an Immanent Infinite in whose self-unfolding movement the various finite concepts are merely moments’.³⁹

The statement quoted above contains some interesting theological consequences. The Qur’anic metaphor, ‘preserved tablet’, though a spatial term, refers to the undetermined possibilities which eternity holds. These undetermined possibilities have in themselves a unity, not a unity of predetermined events, but of possibilities, which in the Leibnizian terminology can be termed as ‘Compossible’. If the spatial metaphor, ‘preserved tablet’⁴⁰ is interpreted in non-spatial terms, it would mean that the entire divine knowledge is eternal, unlimited and non-extended. If, as Iqbal claims, ‘preserved tablet’ holds up all the undetermined possibilities, it would also mean that objects of divine knowledge are not predetermined events, but creative possibilities. Their unity, which is already present in them, would further mean the ‘ideal unity’ of the ‘Compossibles’. But there cannot be an order of ideals which is self-contradictory. Ideals, whether of knowledge or morality, must have a unity even before they are realized or become actual. This interpretation is consistent with what Iqbal says about divine life:

God’s life is self-revelation, not the pursuit of an ideal to be reached. The ‘not-yet’ of man does mean pursuit and may mean failure; the ‘not-yet’ of God means *unfailing realization of the infinite possibilities of His being which retains its wholeness throughout the entire process*.⁴¹

The ‘not-yet’ of God points to a moment of serial time in which the possibilities will get actualized or will become ‘events’. This Iqbalian view is a remarkable advance over the classical theological view that ‘events’ themselves are already there. It is one of the interesting examples of Iqbal’s endeavour to ‘despatialize’ the spatial metaphor.⁴² This is how Iqbal describes the time-process. A time-process cannot be conceived as a line already drawn. It is a line in the drawing of ‘open possibilities’.⁴³ This process of actualization of possibilities applies equally well to the process of creation; according to Iqbal, the idea that the universe is the temporal

working out of a preconceived plan is alien to the Qur'anic outlook. He cites the Qur'anic verse, 'He (God) adds to creation as He wills'⁴⁴ to support his idea that the universe is liable to increase. To him, the universe is a growing one and not an already completed product which left the hand of its maker ages ago, and is now lying stretched out in space as a dead mass of matter to which time does nothing and consequently is nothing. The logical consequence of this idea would certainly be that the creative process, though *ex nihilo*, is a continuous one and there may not be an end to it. In his poetry he had repeatedly suggested that the 'universe is still incomplete; the command to become is being uttered continuously'.

It is not altogether a novel idea, since Ibn al-'Arabi was also inclined to believe that there is no end to divine theophany and Ibn Rushd⁴⁵ also asserted that divine creative activity is eternal. Iqbal has presented it in contemporary idiom to draw further theological implications from it. One of the important consequences is the idea that God is an all-embracing concrete 'self'. If creation is a temporal process, then the nature of ultimate reality must embrace temporal sequence, and that leads him to the idea that ultimate reality, since it cannot allow succession, must be conceived as pure duration wherein thought, life and purpose interpenetrate to form an organic unity which can only be conceived as the unity of a self—an all-embracing concrete self.⁴⁶ Iqbal calls this all-embracing self 'the Absolute Ego', which is 'the whole of Reality'.⁴⁷ Since he is averse to the idea of a perfected creaturely order, this statement does not and cannot mean a static monistic view of reality. The ultimate ego exists in pure duration, 'untouched by weariness, and unseizable by slumber or sleep',⁴⁸ and Iqbal concludes that the ultimate ego cannot be conceived as changeless, motiveless, stagnant neutrality, as an absolute nothing. To the creative self, change cannot mean imperfection. The perfection of the creative self consists in the vast basis of his creativity and the infinite scope of his creative vision.⁴⁹

The idea of the infinity of God means infinite inner possibilities of his creative activity, and the universe which is known to us is only a partial expression. Iqbal defines God's infinity as intensive, not extensive. It involves an infinite series, but is not that series.⁵⁰

Since the ultimate reality is an ego, from the ultimate ego only egos proceed. The creative energy of the ultimate ego, in whom deed and thought

are identical, functions as ego unities.⁵¹ This concept leads Iqbal to the idea of the degrees of reality which he himself admits is an idea which had been worked out by Sheikh al-Ishraq or Sheikh Shihab ud-Din Suhrawardi Maqtul.⁵² In the western philosophic tradition, it is the Leibnizian world-outlook. The entire world order, for Iqbal as for Leibniz, consists of egos of varying degrees. His monadistic view suggests that what is called matter is a colony of lower egos. He is in full agreement with Leibniz on this point, but it is difficult to call his world-outlook Leibnizian, since he believes in intersubjectivity and interaction between egos. Leaving aside such philosophical issues, let us see how he explains the concepts of divine knowledge and omnipotence, the two crucial issues of Islamic theology.

So far as knowledge is concerned, Iqbal's observation, consistent with his non-idealist standpoint, means that so far as finite objects are concerned, it is a temporal process which moves round a veritable other that confronts the knowing ego. From this, he concludes that if we extend knowledge, in this sense, which for him is the only sense, to the point of omniscience, it will remain relative to the confronting other. Pointing out this inherent ambiguity in the term knowledge, he argues that it cannot be predicated on the ultimate ego, since it being all-inclusive cannot be conceived as having a perspective like the finite ego. If there is nothing outside the ultimate ego, then no 'other' can be conceived; divine knowledge must be other than knowledge of objects. He admits that language is unable to express this kind of knowledge which is also creative of its objects. He also rejects the view presented by Royce that 'omniscience' consists of a single indivisible act of perception in an eternal 'now'. Iqbal with his philosophic view of time as representing the onward march of nature, could not possibly agree with this view, since it suggests that the universe is closed and there is an unalterable order of fixed events. He offers one more objection to this view, which is much more significant. He observes that by conceiving God's knowledge as a reflecting mirror and thereby rescuing his fore-knowledge of future events, we do so at the expense of his freedom. The problem assumes a new theological dimension: to reconcile omniscience with his freedom. Further, it leaves no room for novelty and initiative on the part of finite egos. As a resolution of this conflict, he proposes that divine knowledge has to be conceived of as of possibilities and not of events. He

admits that to save human freedom, unconditional omniscience could not be granted to God, but this sort of limitation on the all-inclusive ego is not externally imposed, it is born out of his own creative freedom whereby he chooses finite egos to be the participators of his life, power and freedom.⁵³

Under this scheme of philosophical anthropology, it is evident that the term 'omnipotent' must also be understood and defined in a different manner, since this term, if applied unconditionally, deprives man of his freedom. His answer to this problem is consistent with his philosophical outlook. Omnipotence is related to divine wisdom and therefore it has its own inner limitation.⁵⁴

Iqbal would agree with Martin Buber that God limits himself in all his limitlessness, and makes room for creatures. Transcendence too has to be understood in a non-spatial sense. Since man is finite, God is beyond and since God is an all-inclusive ego, he is within. Iqbal does not seem to be inclined to resolve the tension between transcendence and immanence. These two terms represent only our perspective as finite human beings. Infinite ego, as intensively infinite, is in a sense beyond the finite ego, but since ego or personality is the middle term, God must also be within.

Last, his observations on human ego have to be noted to conclude this discussion. Iqbal concludes his position on human ego on this hopeful note. Human ego is finite, but that finitude is not a misfortune. The Qur'an, according to him, does not contemplate complete liberation from finitude as the highest state of human bliss. The 'unceasing reward' of man consists in his gradual growth in uniqueness, self-possession and in the intensity of his activity as an ego.⁵⁵ Since he has explained divine infinity as intensive, he does not find any difficulty in answering the question: Can the finite ego retain its finitude beside the infinite ego? The finite ego is, of course, distinct but not isolate from the infinite. It is only an ever-growing ego that can belong to the meaning of the universe. It means that finitude is a challenge, a call to rise higher in the scheme of existence.

He would have agreed with Paul Tillich that 'all life process is the more powerful the more non-being it can include in its self-affirmation without being destroyed by it'.⁵⁶

In Iqbal we reach an expanding horizon. How Islamic thought reformulates itself is a question for the future. There is, however, a growing

danger that it may for sometime feel nostalgic for the safe world of the scholastics or for traditional Sufi pantheism.

¹ Paul Tillich, 'Being & Love', in Will Herberg ed., *Four Existential Theologians* (1958; Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1975), p. 304.

² Editor's note: Jalal ud-Din Rumi or ar-Rumi (d. 1273), the greatest Sufi mystic and poet, turned to poetry after his scandalized family forced his beloved to leave town. A wandering dervish named Shams ud-Din of Dabriz was the first of Rumi's loves and inspired *Divan-e Kabir ya Kulliyat-e Shams* ('The Poetry of Shams' indicating the complete identification of lover and beloved). *Masnavi-ye Ma'navi* ('Spiritual Couplets'), inspired by an illiterate goldsmith, and a small collection of occasional talks entitled *Fihi ma fihi* ('There is in it what is in it') are his other works. Rumi's mystical poems—about 30,000 lyrics and a large number of *roba'iyats* (quatrains)—chart out the different stages of his loves.

³ The third (I-i) passing into I-I can also be called the latent (*Batin*) of the I-Thou, as in the Prophet's life, during heightened consciousness, when the Prophet enters into 'communion' rising above the stage of mere 'communication'.

⁴ To the western reader the principle of the Prophet appears enigmatic because Islam, being a monotheistic religion, cannot attribute holiness to anyone except Allah. For a discussion of this enigma, see 'Phenomenon of Muhammad', in Frithjof Schuon *Dimensions of Islam*, trans. P.N. Townsend (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1970).

⁵ Qur'an, xvii, 1.

⁶ Schuon, *Dimensions*, p. 75.

⁷ Qur'an, xxiv, 35.

⁸ Qur'an, i, 10.

⁹ Wilhelm Dilthey, 'The Rise of Hermeneutics', in Paul Connerton ed., *Critical Sociology*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), p. 115.

¹⁰ Hans-Georg Gadamer, 'The Historicity of Understanding', in *ibid.*, p. 132.

¹¹ Editor's note: Ibn Sina (d. 1037), also known as Avicenna, was medieval Islam's leading physician, astronomer, and philosopher. Born in a village which is in today's Uzbekistan, well-read in Aristotle's philosophy, Neoplatonism, Islamic theology and Zoroastrianism, Ibn Sina expounded on the theory of emanation from a 'necessary existent' and a series of intelligences, culminating in the 'active intelligence'. The wide range of his thought can be surmised from, apart from those already cited in this essay, *Kitab ash-shifa* or 'Book of Healing', *al-Qanun fi at-tibb* or 'The Canon of Medicine' and *Lisan al-'arab* or 'The Arabic Language'.

¹² Ibn Sina, *Kitab an-Najat* or 'Book of Salvation' (Cairo, 1938), pp. 270–74.

[13](#) Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. I (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1951), p. 193.

[14](#) Ibn Sina, *Kitab al-Isharat wa 'l-Tanbiyat* ('Book of Directives and Remarks'), ed., Sulayman Dunya (Cairo, n.d.), p. 225.

[15](#) Ibn Sina, *Kitab an-Najat*, pp. 498–506.

[16](#) Editor's note: Al-Farabi (d. 950), also known, in Latinized versions, as Alfarabius or Alfarabius or Avennasar, is regarded as the greatest philosophical authority after Aristotle. In contrast to al-Kindi, al-Farabi recast philosophy in a new framework analogous to Islam. Al-Farabi's political theology aimed at clarifying the foundations of the Islamic community and defend its reform so as to promote scientific inquiry and encourage philosophers to play an active role in practical affairs.

[17](#) Al-Farabi, *Tahsil al-Sa'adah* (Hyderabad: Dairat al-Ma'arif, n.d.)

[18](#) Refer Majid Fakhry, *Islamic Occasionalism and its Critique by Averroes and Aquinas* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1958).

[19](#) Editor's note: Adherents of a rationalist trend in Islam, the Mu'tazilite school (from *Mu'tazilah*, those who withdraw or stand apart) evolved during the eighth and ninth centuries in Arabia. Its main tenets were 'unity' and 'justice'. The Mu'tazilites adhered to a strict monotheism, and hence were against any anthropomorphic concepts of God. This school, often labelled as free thinkers and heretics, is traced back to Wasil ibn 'Ata (also called Abu Hudhayfah, d. 748), and used the categories and methods of Greco-Roman philosophy. It was al-Ash'ari who broke the force of this movement by using similar Hellenistic rational methods.

[20](#) Reference to the Qur'anic verse

Verily in the heavens and the earth are signs for those who believe. And in the creation of yourselves and the fact that animals are scattered (through the earth) are signs for those of assured Faith. And in the alternation of night and day, and the fact that God sends down sustenance from the sky, and revives therewith the earth after its death, and in the change of the winds are signs, for those who are wise (xlv: 3–5).

This verse clearly indicates that change is not mere flux, it has an ordered structure.

[21](#) Editor's note: Ibn al-'Arabi (d. 1240), mystic-philosopher who gave Islamic thought its first full-fledged philosophic expression, was born in the southeast of Spain, but after his education he set out and settled in West Asia. His major works are *al-Futuh al-Makkiya* ('The Meccan Revelations'), *Fusus al-hikam* ('The Bezels of Wisdom') and a collection of love poems entitled *Tarjuman al-ashwaq* ('The Interpreter of Desires').

[22](#) Ibn al-'Arabi, 'Fass Zakariyya' in *Fusus al-Hikam*, ed., Abu 'l-'Ala 'Afifi (Beirut: Dar al-Kitabal-Arab, 1966).

[23](#) Henry Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*, trans., Ralph Manheim

(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 5.

[24](#) Introduction to *Fusus*, p. 36.

[25](#) Introduction to *Fusus*. See, also, Sayyed Hossein Nasr's discussion, 'Ibn Arabi', in his *Three Muslim Sages* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1956), p. 30.

[26](#) Editor's note: Al-Husain or al-Husayn Ibn Mansur al-Hallaj (d. 922), controversial Islamic mystic and 'intoxicated', as opposed to the 'sober', Sufi. Al-Junaid is the most famous among the string of his renowned teachers. Al-Hallaj's life is marked by extensive travels, preaching, teaching and writing about the way to an intimate relationship with God. Having aroused the suspicion of the authorities and Sufi masters, he was also supposed to have links with subversive groups as well as with the Zanj rebellion in southern Mesopotamia carried out by oppressed black slaves. After his third pilgrimage to Mecca, he was arrested for being involved in an attempt at political as well as moral reform. He was imprisoned for more than ten years since there was no consensus and the long-drawn-out trial was marked by indecision. Eventually he was crucified and tortured to death in public; he is reported to have calmly endured the torture and to have forgiven his accusers. Shortly before his arrest he is said to have uttered the phrase *ana al-Haq* ('I am the Truth').

[27](#) Paul Tillich, quoted in Havold A. Bassilus ed., *Contemporary Problems in Religion* (Detroit: Wayne University Press, 1956), p. 30.

[28](#) S. Vahiduddin, *Religion at the Cross Roads* (Delhi: Idarah-e Adabiyat-e Delhi, 1980), p. 29.

Editor's note: Vahiduddin, who died in May 1998, was also Alam Khundmiri's Ph.D. supervisor.

[29](#) Qur'an, xiii, 11.

[30](#) Editor's note: Jamal ud-Din al-Afghani (d. 1897), politician, political agitator and journalist whose belief in the potency of a revived Islamic civilization in the face of European domination significantly influenced Islamic thought in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Calcutta and Hyderabad are among the considerable number of places he visited and Muhammad `Abduh and Rashid Riza are later reformers influenced by him. Apart from publishing an anti-British newspaper, al-Afghani also engaged Ernest Renan, the French historian and philosopher, in a famous debate concerning the position of Islam regarding science.

[31](#) See, Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age; 1798–1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970) and Majid Fakhry, 'The Emergence of the Modernist Spirit: Jamal al Din al Afghani and Muhammad `Abduh', in his *A History of Islamic Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 333–67.

[32](#) Cited in Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, p. 122.

[33](#) Muhammad `Abduh, *Risalat al-Tawhid, (The Theology of Unity)*, translated by Musa'ad Ishaq and Kenneth Cragg (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1966).

Editor's note: Muhammad `Abduh (1849–1905), religious scholar, jurist and liberal reformer, was influenced by al-Afghani and led the late nineteenth-century reform movement in Egypt and other

Muslim countries. As *mufti* (Islamic legal counsellor) for Egypt (from 1899), he effected reforms in Islamic law, administration and higher education. `Abduh tried to break through the rigidities of scholastic interpretation and to promote considerations of equity, welfare and common sense, even if this occasionally meant disregarding the literal text of the Qur'an.

`Abduh's most important writings include *Risalat al-Tawhid* ('Treatise on the Oneness of God'). Al-Afghani, `Abduh and Iqbal are widely held to be among the most important figures in the nineteenth-and twentieth-century reform movements. Rashid Riza was influenced by both al-Afghani and `Abduh.

[34](#) For more detailed discussions, see Albert Hourani's *Arabic Thought* and Majid Fakhry's *A History of Islamic Philosophy*.

[35](#) Editor's note: Sadr ud-Din ash-Shirazi or Mulla Sadra (d. 1640) is the philosopher who led the Iranian cultural renaissance of the seventeenth century. He is the foremost representative of the *Ishraqi* or illuminationist school of philosopher-mystics. His most famous work is *Asfar* ('Journeys'). According to him, the entire universe, except God and his Knowledge, was originated both eternally as well as temporally. Nature is the substance of all things, the cause for all movement and is permanent. It furnishes the continuing link between the eternal and the originated.

[36](#) Interest in this great medieval Iranian philosopher has been growing for over the last four decades. There are, however, different interpretations of this philosophic genius. For example, see, Fazlur Rahman, *The Philosophy of Mullah Sadra Shirazi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1976) and Sayyid Hossein Nasr, *Sadr al-Din Shirazi and his Transcendent Theosophy* (Boulder: Great Eastern, 1979). The latter emphasizes the theosophical esoteric aspect, while the former forces one to carefully study Sadra's great work in Arabic, *al-Asfar al-Arba`ah*. Mullah Sadra Shirazi was read and taught in Iranian theological seminaries as well as in Indian learned circles. An Urdu translation of *al-Asfar* was published by Osmania University, Hyderabad, as far back as in the 1930s.

[37](#) This aspect of Syed Ahmed Khan was bitterly attacked by Jamal ud-Din al-Afghani in his *The Refutation of the Materialists*. However, this attack seems to be motivated more by his dislike of Syed Ahmed Khan's programme for westernization. For a detailed discussion, see Altaf Husain Hali's biographical *Hayat-e Javid* (Agra: Matba `Mufid-I `Aam, 1903).

Editor's note: Syed Ahmed Khan or Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817–98), Muslim educationist, jurist, author and founder of the Anglo-Mohammadan Oriental College (established 1877; later, Aligarh Muslim University), is regarded as the principal motivating force behind the revival of Indian Islam in the nineteenth-century. Apart from starting the journal *Tahzib al-Akhlaq* ('Social Reform') in the 1870s, he wrote *Athar assanadid* (1847; 'Monuments of the Great'), *Essays on the Life of Mohammad* (1870; translated from Urdu by his son) and a pamphlet, *Asbab-e-Baghawat-e-Hind* ('The Causes of the Indian Revolt,') which laid bare the weaknesses and errors of the British administration that led to the 1857 rebellion.

³⁸ Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934; Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 1994), p. 6; hereafter, *Reconstruction*.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Qur'anic verse (lxxxv, 22),

Nay this, a Glorious Qu'ran,
(inscribed) on 'a Tablet Preserved'.

⁴¹ Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. 57; emphasis added.

⁴² If Paul Tillich, in *Theology as the Revival of the Prophetic Message* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), is correct that 'time' is a prophetic principle against 'space'.

⁴³ Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. 52.

⁴⁴ Qur'an, xxxv, 1.

⁴⁵ Editor's note: Ibn Rushd (d. 1198), Latin form Averrhoes or Averroes, is credited with integrating Greek and Islamic traditions. The most important aspect of his work would be that he attempted a defence of philosophy against his predecessor al-Ghazali's attack (mostly directed at Ibn Sina and al-Farabi) in a very unfavourable social and political atmosphere. Counterpointing al-Ghazali's *Tahafut*, he wrote *Tahafut at-tahafut al-Falasifa* ('The Incoherence of the Incoherence of the Philosopher'). Ibn Rushd also wrote a series of commentaries on most of Aristotle's works (most important is the commentary on *Nicomachean Ethics*) as well as a significant commentary on Plato's *The Republic*. Apart from *Kulliyat* (Latin *Colliget*, 'General Medicine'), his other major works are *Fasl* ('Decisive Treatise on the Agreement Between Religious Law and Philosophy'), and *Manahij* ('Examination of the Methods of Proof Concerning the Doctrines of Religion'). Though upholding Shariah as against the Greek *nomos* (law), Ibn Rushd regretted the position of women in Islam compared with their civic equality in Plato's formulation.

⁴⁶ Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. 53.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 57.

⁴⁸ Reference to the Qur'anic verse 'God: There is no God, but He, the living, the Self-Subsisting Eternal/No slumber can seize Him nor sleep!' (Qur'an, ii, 255).

⁴⁹ Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. 57.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 61.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 68.

⁵² Editor's note: Shihab ud-Din Ibn as-Suhrawardi, also known as al-Maqtul or Sheikh al-Ishraq (d. 1191) was a mystic theologian and philosopher. He was put to death as a result of severe opposition to the pantheistic overtones in his teachings. The appellation al-Maqtul ('the killed') meant that he is not to be considered a martyr. Doctrinal as well as philosophical works attributed to him amount to

fifty, of which *Hikmat al-Ishraq* ('The Wisdom of Illumination'), professing that essences are creations of the intellect and that existence is a single continuum culminating in a pure light that he called God, is the best-known.

[53](#) Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. 75.

[54](#) Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, cited in Will Herberg ed., *Four Existential Theologians*, p. 217.

[55](#) Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. 111.

[56](#) Paul Tillich, *Love, Power and Justice*, cited in Annemarie Schimmel, *Gabriel's Wing: A Study of the Religious Ideas of Sir Muhammad Iqbal* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1963), p. 128.

Some Problems of Inter-religious Understanding

Inter-religious understanding involving a reflective attitude has a recent origin. In the past this activity was the prerogative of theologians whose exclusive aim was to refute the claims of other religions to finality and perfection. This preoccupation of theologians with refutation of rival faiths was hardly conducive to a sincere and dispassionate inquiry into the question of religious truth itself. The possibility that a faith other than one's own can contain an element of truth was almost ruled out. Even the followers of Islam¹ were not prepared to make a sincere attempt towards understanding the exact nature of the beliefs of other religious men.² The case of men of other faiths was not radically different. The reason for this neglect might have been the 'either/or' attitude in religious matters. The conviction of the truth of one's own faith had completely closed the doors of understanding. The dogmatic certainty that truth will ultimately prevail, and that truth is completely inside one's own faith, is always incompatible with a serious understanding of other faiths because no one would ever seriously study falsehood.

The modern age has, however, introduced a new element in the religious situation. It has already become a fact of contemporary life that plurality of faiths is not provisional; it is, on the contrary, rooted in the human situation. The intense activity of the proselytizing religions during the last so many centuries had proved one important fact: historical religions are much more stubborn than they had been considered. The areas of conversion, in most of the cases, were and still are areas of 'darkness' where no 'revealed word' had reached. Islam could not replace Christianity in the Balkan world where the Ottomans ruled for a long time and a minority of Muslims could not be converted to Christianity in the same area even after the expulsion of the Ottomans. Even in West Asia, the heart of the Islamic world, Christianity

proved quite stubborn. One thousand years of Islamic rule in India could not disturb the important areas of Hinduism. Mere tolerance of the Muslim rulers cannot satisfactorily explain this fact of history. The real explanation lies, perhaps, in the stubbornness of instituted/institutionalized religions. It is not insignificant that Islam in India spread initially in areas where Hinduism was unfortified. It is also not insignificant that Islam and Christianity, after more than 1,000 years of fierce theological battle, are still in contention in Africa. One has to study carefully the impact of atheistic communism, the twentieth-century rival to religions, on the majority of believers in the erstwhile Soviet Union, China and socialist Europe. These facts are not insufficient to prove that religious pluralism is a fact of life and what will happen at the 'end of time' will be an event outside history. Men of faith still believe and most probably will always believe, so long as faith exists, that theirs is the truest faith³—and this belief is the only logic of having a faith—but this does not necessarily prove the falsehood of the unaccepted faiths. First, what is not accepted is not necessarily unacceptable and, second, there might be degrees of truth as, in the scientific field, there are realms of truth. In spite of this conviction, men of faith can hardly afford to live a monadic life, quite unconcerned with the beliefs and convictions of their neighbours, while inhabiting the same planet. Modern life has forced upon human beings a need for increased communication of ideas and a better understanding of each other's positions. Co-existence is not mere political expedience, it has also become a theological need. Different faiths do not anymore exclude each other, they are, rather, becoming alternative means of discovering meaning in life. There are sincere and passionately religious people all around who not only find some truth outside their own religious tradition but have also shown a remarkable, hitherto unknown, ability to incorporate that truth into their own religious life without, however, falling out with their traditional religious orders. The age of religious fanaticism is coming to an end and it seems, particularly due to the increased means of communication, that the only alternative to an ordered religious life will be an attitude of religious 'indifferentism' which might, in future, create some serious moral and spiritual problems, if one bears in mind the fact that human societies are becoming increasingly permissive. The only alternative to religious and

moral indifferentism is a passionate and sincere attempt on the part of men of faith to understand the faiths of their neighbours. But as all things which are desirable and even necessary are not easy, inter-religious understanding is also a difficult task and presents certain problems which are not easy to solve. The first problem which presents itself in this connection is the meaning of religion itself. One of the most perceptive writers on this subject, Cantwell Smith, doubts the propriety of using the term 'religion' in a serious study of the phenomena usually considered to be 'religious'. He suggests that what men have tended to conceive as religious and especially as a religion, can more rewardingly, more truly, be conceived in terms of two dynamic, though different, factors: (a) a historical 'cumulative tradition', and (b) the 'personal faith' of men and women.⁴

Cantwell Smith has successfully proved that the term 'religion' is inadequate to describe the entire phenomena of 'religions', but, in the absence of another term which could explain the relation between the two factors (cumulative tradition and personal faith), one feels compelled to use it. What one understands by religion is precisely a synthesis of personal faith and cumulative tradition. The tension between these two factors is the dynamics of religious life. Personal faith arises in a certain cumulative tradition and, in case personal faith is creative, it enlarges and even transforms the nature of cumulative tradition itself. There is hardly an instance of personal faith which has no relation to a certain tradition, and there is hardly a tradition which has remained static in spite of a dynamic personal faith arising within that tradition. Religion gives a specific quality to faith as well as to tradition. This can be called an a priori of the faith as well as of the tradition. In the terminology of Rudolf Otto, it is the 'numinous' or the 'holy', the 'mysterium magnum', which is, on the one hand, an a priori category of mind, and, on the other, an entity manifesting itself in outward appearance.⁵ This presence of the holy or the numinous gives a specific character to personal faith and to the cumulative tradition. Religion is present whenever there is a reference to the transcendent. A faith which is related to the transcendent is qualitatively different from a faith in which this relation is totally absent or merely marginally present, as faith in the proletariat or in a nation. As man is conditioned by situations, the a priori in religion, or the relation to the transcendent manifests itself in

and through history. Religious traditions grow out of man's response to the transcendent and as man's response had not been uniform in history, there are different religious traditions. As religion is man's response to the transcendent, man's concern with the ultimate, religions are mankind's different responses, different ways of articulating its concern with and commitment to the ultimate. From this point of view, understanding of a faith other than one's own will be an understanding of a different manifestation of the same concern. As the transcendent is also infinite, one can say that no response can be regarded as absolute, and hence the need to look at other responses of the same kind with humility and compassion.

The phrase 'inter-religious understanding' implies that men of faith try to understand each other's faith. Since it has been pointed out that faith expresses itself in history, it is clear that it is not abstract faith which has to be understood but the living faith which has evolved, is evolving, in history. The similes of the chaff and the grain or the kernel and the shell do not properly describe the relation between faith and tradition. Inter-religious conflicts do not usually arise on the concept of God because concepts, being a matter of intellectual cognition, do not generate emotions. It is usually on the question of the manner in which men of faith establish their relation with God that conflicts arise and the history of religions shows that there is no one way of establishing this relation even in one religious tradition. What is essence and what is accident cannot be easily determined. Accidents arise, in most cases, out of essences, particularly in living organisms. A close study of how sects and denominations arise out of the original faith throws ample light on this problem. 'Heresies' do not always enter from outside, they have a relation with the growth of a faith in diverse conditions and different time-moments. One can understand the growth of another faith better if one studies the growth of 'heresies' or 'sects' inside one's own religious tradition. For the Sufi, inside Islam, his own doctrines and practices represent the essence; the institutions which arose around law and dogma are mere chaff. On the other hand, to the orthodox theologian, like Ibn Taymiya in medieval Islam, and to the neo-orthodox in the contemporary age, Sufism itself with all its visions and practices is the worst kind of heresy, quite sufficient to condemn the Sufi for eternal damnation. Among the Sufis of various orders the situation was not very

different. The medieval Indian Sufi theologian Sheikh Ahmed Sirhindi⁶ waged a fierce battle against the upholders of the doctrine of *wahdat-al-wujud* which he condemned as a heresy. On the other hand, for the ‘unityists’ the essence of Islamic monotheism lies in the doctrine of unity. There is a remarkable continuity of thought from al-Junaid⁷ to Ibn al-`Arabi on this point. Ibn Hanbal regarded God as a ‘person’ for whom the creaturely order is the ‘other’, while the unityists considered the idea of ‘otherness’ as a near associationism, *shirk*. There was hardly any unanimity on the idea of the essential humanity of Muhammad within the community of ‘believers’. If the orthodox theologians of Sunni Islam regarded his humanity as an essence of the dogma, the Sufis made a subtle distinction between the prophetic and the saintly aspects of the Prophet. Al-Hallaj interpreted the idea of Muhammad as *abd* in a more or less theosophic manner in terms of theophany. Ibn al-`Arabi developed a ‘cosmology’ around the idea of the ‘primacy’ of the essence of Muhammad in his mystical writings. If the visible arts grew around the themes of Jesus Christ in medieval Christianity, devotional poetry developed around the person of Muhammad in Persian and sometimes even in Arabic poetry. The orthodox legist and the fundamentalist theologian would regard this literature as the worst heresy. Ibn Taymiya raised a polemic battle against such exaggerated ideas about the Prophet, which according to him do not find a place either in the Book or the sacred *sunna*. Heresy or orthodoxy, passionate notions, such as Muhammad being an intercessor who can be invoked for help in this world and also on the last day of Judgement, form part of an average Muslim’s appreciation of the personality of the Prophet. In case such passions are regarded as mere chaff, what will remain in the name of the grain will, perhaps, be hardly satisfying to the average believer whose need for personal religion is ‘more’, is of a different order, than that of the intellectual-theologian.

If one turns one’s attention from essences to history, the question of orthodoxy itself cannot be settled in a satisfactory manner. If the branching of early historical Christianity into the Greek and Latin traditions was itself a split of orthodoxy, the split of early Islam into Sunni and Sh`ia Islam was not a deviation from the ‘right path’ but two ‘insights’, although radically different, of determining the ‘right path’. One may even refer to the fierce

battle around the question of the 'createdness' or 'uncreatedness' of the Qur'an in the early phase of the growth of Islamic theology. The upholders of the latter doctrine are usually called orthodox, but the fact remains that the so-called Mu'tazilites were eager to consistently maintain the idea of the unity of God (*al-tauhid*). This suggests that orthodoxy does not have a close relation with 'essence'. A proper understanding of Islam would include all aspects of the Islamic tradition; for example, Indian Islam, in its medieval and recent history, would incorporate the frictions which arose out of the question of the emergence of the Mehdi.⁸ The personal faith of even an enlightened Muslim derives elements from one or the other tradition. While moving from one tradition to the other, one might feel one is moving from one religion to another, as it is often felt when one moves from the Dhammapada of Theravada Buddhism to the Mahayana tradition, or from the non-dualist Samkara tradition, cold and intellectual, to the devotional Vaishnavism or to the Shiva cults. Perhaps, Hocking has made a very important point 'in proportion as any religion grows in self-understanding through grasping its own essence, it grasps the essence of all religions and gains in power to interpret its various forms'.⁹

Yet another hurdle is introduced when one embarks upon the study of other faiths. As a perceptive sociologist of religion has pointed out, all expression of religious experience falls under three headings: theoretical, practical and sociological.¹⁰ The first obviously means that religions have a cognitive element which is itself expressed in and through language. The element of language in literature, particularly in poetry, also becomes a stumbling block, but as religion, unlike poetry, is perceived as representing 'a total response of the total human person', the problem of language in religion becomes far more complex. Here we are not concerned with the criticism of the different schools of linguistic philosophy or religious language, as it ultimately makes all discussion about religion meaningless, and consequently the present discussion a mere exercise in futility. Suffice to point out here that although there is a referential element in religious language, it does not refer to an 'it', it refers to a 'subject'. In the I-thou encounter both are subjects, possessing varying levels of subjectivity. A serious difficulty, however, arises, when the 'thou' in this relation speaks as an 'I', and this precisely is the moment when religion, particularly of the

prophetic type, is born. At this stage, one is also required to make an intellectual effort to distinguish between a revealed or prophetic religion and the religion of mysticism. In the latter type there is seldom any reversal of roles; it is always the 'I' which recognizes itself as the 'thou', and it is the 'I' which speaks from the innermost depths of its being, which it declares as identical with the 'thou'. In this type the 'I' devours the 'thou' and this is considered the consummate moment of self-consciousness. It is, therefore, not surprising that the language of mysticism approximates to the language of poetry. There is hardly any command in the 'mystic religion', and hence the breakdown of communication between the two types of religions. It is only when there is an occasional prophetic interregnum in the mystic religious tradition that the two types can enter into a dialogue, which happened once in the mystic tradition of India in the form of the Bhagavad Gita—'thou' speaking to an 'I'. One cannot possibly explain the transformation of the amorphous Vedic religion—the Vedas, of course, include the Upanishads—into Hinduism without this prophetic interregnum. This example gets us nearer to the solution of the apparent dichotomy between the mystic and prophetic types of religion. The mystic and the prophetic are not two irreconcilable opposites but two polar visions between which mature religious consciousness swings. If prophetic religion heightens the *mysterium tremendum* the mystic vision centres more around the *mysterium fascinosum*,¹¹ terms which owe their origin to Rudolf Otto. But as the understanding of phenomena largely depends upon the appreciation of differences, and not their obliteration, the point of contact as well as the point of divergence have to be borne in mind. Understanding is however thwarted by the two sets of linguistic expressions employed in the communication of the mystic and the prophetic visions. As further development of linguistic expression largely depends upon the original language used, the gap increases in the course of history. An attitude of either/or will hardly prove conducive to understanding. One has only to remember that the prophetic type has moments of mystic vision and the mystic vision has the alternative moment of prophetic vision—'the existential anguish of the otherness'. In spite of this convergence, the fact remains, a phenomenology of most mystic systems would reveal this same fact, that different mystic paths are predetermined by the religious

metaphysics of the religions from which they bracketed out. The mystic paths inspired and determined by the prophetic vision of God are bound to be different from such mystic paths which do not have a particular prophetic vision to guide them. For instance, Islamic *tasawwuf* makes its starting point the tremendous distance of man from God, which it tries to compensate for by a passionate longing to overcome this distance. It makes the doctrine of *tauhid* its focal point and later tries to expand its mystic consequences. But the idea of monotheism, the original prophetic vision, persistently haunts the Sufi. The possibility of a ‘neutral language’—an idea suggested by F. S. C. Northrop¹² for discussing various religions and the relation between mystic and prophetic expressions—is rather remote, however desirable it might appear to facilitate inter-religious dialogue. A careful study of even prophetic religions points to certain difficulties in this direction. To take only one instance, does the word ‘revelation’ actually express the entire meaning of the Islamic term *wahy*? The former term presupposes the possibility of ‘divine disclosure’ in ways other than the ‘spoken word’ and the Qur’anic term *wahy* tends to exclude any other possibility except the ‘spoken word’.¹³ On the question whether revelation continues, the Scandinavian theologian Soderblom¹⁴ answers in the affirmative that in the three areas of nature, history and moral life, it is possible. This position will hardly be acceptable to a Muslim theologian unless the term ‘revelation’ here approximates to the idea of Sign (*ayat*) which the Qur’an employs to describe the status of nature and history (as signs of God). Even for the Sufi, the idea of ‘divine disclosure’ excludes revelation through either nature or history. A Sufi will rather prefer the Neoplatonic terminology of ‘Descensions’ (*tanazzulat*). No Muslim theologian has been able to understand the Hindu term ‘devas’ denoting entities undoubtedly less than God. A Muslim can possibly appreciate the term if he compares this term with the *angels* of his own tradition, he might even find some similarity between ‘mythology’ and ‘angelology’. This understanding will not be carried out through a neutral terminology by analogy and here one has to remember the limitations of analogy. The method of analogy might lead to the idea of the ‘transcendental unity of religions’, but, again, one has to be careful that unity at the transcendental level does not obliterate the distinctions at the existential level, because it is

precisely at this level that religions have their meaning and become relevant to the concrete existing human individual and communities.

This discussion leads to one more important consideration—the last one in this paper—and that is about the question of the ‘universal’ in religion. A phenomenological study of religions suggests that the question cannot be settled in terms of concepts; it can only be understood in terms of attitude. Concepts point to entities, and entities are finite. They are governed by logic which tends to conceive dynamic processes as static objects and hence their failure to explain the universals in religion. Religious life, as it has been pointed out earlier, presupposes tensions, and concepts do not adequately describe tensions, particularly when they arise in the human spirit. Religious expressions are finally the expressions of attitudes and it is in this context that Wittgenstein’s remark, ‘An expression has meaning only in the stream of life’ is valid. When one goes beyond the verbal propositions employed in theology one finds that the only universal in religion is one’s own attitude to the transcendent—the *mysterium magnum*. The passionate search for universals in religion has often led the investigator to the notion of ‘a/the universal religion’, a philosophical legacy of Platonism which looks at world religions as mere particular instances of the highest and the most perfect religion of all, of which the individual religions are more or less distorted versions. If this notion of perfect religion goes along with that of a ‘perfected religion’, then the doors of understanding are finally closed. There will not be much harm if the idea of a perfected religion is only applied to a vision, an occasion when God by his unlimited grace disclosed his intention to humanity, but serious consequences arise if this notion is extended to include the entire translation of this vision in a contingent historical situation. It does not mean that a truly religious person has to sever all ties with a particular religious tradition; it only means that one remember the contingent in history, and not transfer the attribute of infallibility to history.¹⁵ The divine immanence in history does not exhaust God’s infinity though he at the same time transcends it.

One cannot overlook the paradox, while searching for universals in religion, that religions, particularly the institutionalized historical religions, reveal some sort of a monadic structure, which also reveal their finite

nature. Religions, like different living human beings are not mere names; they are unique beings having their own history. They disclose their inner possibilities which result from their tryst with transcendence in the course of history. Each religion has become something because it had already been something. Aristotle, when he wrote that a thing becomes what it is and that the essence of a thing lies in its development, is a better guide in this matter. Since the a priori in religion works as in history, there is not and will never be one uniform line of development. The history of each religion is something like the biography of a person, and, to quote Otto again,

biography is a lamentable and unreal business in the case of a man who has no real unique potentiality of his own, no special idiosyncrasy and is therefore a mere point of intersection for various fortuitous causal series, acted upon, as it were, from without.¹⁶

Does it mean, that the final end of this process of inter-religious understanding is despair? It is certainly not the proper response. The experience of Ibn al-`Arabi testifies that to have lived one religion fully is to have 'lived them all'.¹⁷ One has to live a religion like a true *abd* of God, and leave the question of the final truth to him alone, who is the last refuge of mankind. 'And verily unto thy Lord is the limit' (Qur'an). This is the only way to understand faiths other than one's own.

¹ Islam was, perhaps, the first religion which accepted the fact of plurality of faiths (*Din*). In one of the early Meccan verses, the Qur'an, addressing those who had rejected the faith, declared:

O ye
That reject faith:
I worship not that
which ye worship.

Nor will ye worship that
which I worship and I
will not worship that which
ye have been wont to worship.

Nor will ye worship
That which I worship.
To you be your way
And to me mine. (cix, 1–6)

² Ibn Hazm's *Al-fasl Fi-al-Milal Wa-nNahl* and al-Shahristani's *Kitab al-Milal Wa-nNahl* are not exceptions, as the intention of these authors was not so much to appreciate the standpoints of other faiths as to prove the falsehood and inadequacy of other faiths. I have singled out Muslim theologians only because the Qur'an accepts the fact of plurality of faiths.

Editor's note: Muhammad Ibn `Abd al-Karim al-Shahristani (d. 1153), theologian, heresiographer and historian of religions. Apart from the above mentioned text ('Book of Sects and Creeds'), he has also written *Kitab nihayat al-iqdam fi `ilm al-kalam* ('The Height of Daring in the Sciences of Theology').

³ It does not contradict the Hindu position which maintains that there are diverse ways to salvation, because this is itself a religious position.

⁴ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (New York: Mentor Press, 1964), p. 175.

⁵ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of Holy*, trans., J.W. Harvey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 192.

⁶ Editor's note: Sirhindi (1564?–1624), also spelled Shaikh Ahmad Sirhandi, played a very significant role in the reassertion and revival of orthodox Sunni Islam in India as a reaction against the syncretic and pantheistic tendencies prevalent during Akbar's reign. He refuted the monistic position of *wahdat al-wujud* (the concept of divine existential unity of God and the world, and hence man) by advancing *wahdat ash-shuhud* (the concept of unity of vision). His important work is *Maktubat*, a collection of letters written to friends and disciples. He was bestowed the title *Mujaddid-e Alaf-e Thani*, 'Renovator of the Second Millenium'.

⁷ Editor's note: Abu al-Qasim al-Junaid or Junayd (d. 910) pursued the experience of unity with God, first by being 'drunk' with his love and with love of him, and then by acquiring life-transforming self-possession and control. Al-Hallaj was alJunaid's disciple.

⁸ The reference is to the Mehdwai, or Mahdvi, and the Quadiyani movements in Indian Islam.

Editor's note: The Mehdi, or Mahdi, a spiritual and temporal leader, will, it is believed, rule before the end of the world and restore religion and justice. The concept was introduced into Islam through Sufi channels influenced by Christianity.

The Qadiani, or Quadiyani, an offshoot of the Ahmadiya sect, was founded in Qadian, Punjab, India, in 1889 by Mirza Ghulam Ahmed (1839–1908) who claimed to be the Mehdi. A highly organized community, the school preaches belief in one true Islam, with Muhammad and Mirza Ghulam Ahmed as prophets. After 1947, the group officially relocated to Rabwah, Pakistan.

⁹ William E. Hocking, *Living Religions and a World Faith* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1940), p. 198.

¹⁰ Joachim Wach, *Types of Religious Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 34.

¹¹ For instance, the event of Ascension (*Mi'raj*) in the life of the Prophet of Islam and his ecstatic utterance: *li ma'a Allah-e waqtun*. There is a popular hadith, often used by the Sufis: *Man-ra-ani faqad ra-al Haq*, 'One who has seen me has seen the Truth'.

¹² In his *The Meeting of East and West* (New York: Macmillan, 1946).

¹³ It is one of the probable sources of tension between orthodox Islam and the Sufis in the history of Islamic culture.

¹⁴ Editor's note: Nathan Soderblom (1866–1931), Swedish Lutheran archbishop and theologian, received the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1930 for his contribution towards Christian, and thereby international unity. He professed that the concept of holiness, rather than the idea of God, is the basic notion in religious thought.

¹⁵ According to a strict interpretation of monotheism, it would be an act of idolatry.

¹⁶ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of Holy*, p. 193.

¹⁷ Cited by Sayyed Hossein Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1956), p. 116.

Religion and its Application to Modern Life: The Islamic Problem

The question 'has religion any application to modern life'? is one of the most dangerous questions that a religious person can ask. The state of mind of the questioner is then one of doubt about the very relevance of religion to modern age. Moreover, he seems to attach a semi-mystical reverence to modern age. In this question, the second term 'modern age' seems to have acquired a greater importance than the first term 'religion'. It is bound to irritate a man of religion whose faith is so firm that he has shut his eyes to the questions and problems of the modern age. Although dangerous, this question is one of the most relevant ones of the contemporary age.

A clarification is, however, needed for a fruitful discussion on this subject. When one talks of modern life or modern age, one has already assumed that modernity is shared by the inhabitants of the entire civilized world, fully developed or in the process of development. This assumption is not, however, totally correct. The problems of the developed western countries are different from those of the not-yet-developed countries. Religion has already undergone enormous changes in western countries during the last 400 years, and hardly plays any significant role in the life of a contemporary western man. The western man long ago decided that religious authority will not be allowed to interfere in the secular sphere of life; this meant that religion will have a marginal place in the life of the community. In the beginning, this decision only meant that church and state are being separated from each other, but as the organization of modern life largely depends on science and technology, they very soon assumed the importance which was once attached to religion. Scientific culture is based on perceptual experience and interpretation as a rational system. The

empirical outlook and a reliance on positive experience are the manifestations of this broad scientific outlook. Even those who believe in the possibility of a transcendental world do not feel any need of religion for the phenomenal world. The phenomenal world does not only mean the world of physical space and time, the subject matter of science—it has become co-equal with the entire human world. As the area of visibility became enlarged due to scientific and technological advances, the invisible world, for a scientifically inclined person, merely denotes the not-yet visible. If pre-scientific culture interpreted the visible in terms of the invisible and regarded the visible as a small but manifest portion of the invisible, the scientific mind does quite the reverse and regards the latter as a mere extension of the former. In matters of communal life, sacred law and the authority of the church have no relevance, not even marginal. It is significant to note that for the vast majority of mankind living in the western world and engaged in productive work, religion only means attending church on specific days. Mostly, it is only the élite who feel some need for religion, along with art and literature. In this situation, no serious thinker in the West talks of the application of religion to modern life.

The situation is, however, different in the countries of Asia, Islamic Africa and Buddhist southeast Asia, where religion still plays a dominant role and has a wider area of relevance. In these regions, religion can encourage or hinder the process of social change and it is unfortunate that it often only hinders the process. Religion is not only concerned with the invisible in these part of the world, but it is central even to the visible world. The great religions of the orient—Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism—have regulated and still continue to regulate the entire life of the oriental man. In the Hindu and Buddhist worlds, it is not uncommon that an astronomer, practising the ancient science of astrology, still regulates the daily routine of a person. Science is still a profession and has not yet become a way of life. Law and politics are largely governed by religious traditions in spite of secular professions, and the secular legislator has to seek, on critical occasions, sanction from religious tradition. Secularism is accepted in politics though secularization is rejected, which, instead of solving problems of politics and law, increases tensions. Even persons in authority confuse secularism with tolerance and positive respect for religion. The scientist as well as the politician suffer from a false

consciousness and the result is an increasing confusion in public life. Life, is, however, moving in a different direction. Science has been introduced as a major discipline in universities and centres of higher learning; technology has been accepted as the major determinant of our productive life. Western institutions of government and law-making have been established and the principle of the sovereignty of the people has become a dogmatic truth. The modern means of production along with the new concept of humanism are striking at the roots of the classical hierarchical society. The orient is impatient to catch up with the West in technological development and scientific advancement. Institutions for the development of atomic energy have become a matter of prestige in oriental societies. Democracy and socialism are becoming signs of enlightenment, and even authoritarian regimes feel obliged to coin terms like guided democracy and basic democracy. Terms like 'Islamic socialism' and 'Hindu socialism' are quite current in the countries of the East. The battles fought by the Prophet of Islam and the wars in Mahabharata and Ramayana are being interpreted in contemporary terms. These attempts are, in a sense, a triumph of modernity, but they can also be looked upon as a retreat of classical religions. If this process continues further, the East will lose its identity and will eventually become a slavish imitator of the West without being its equal. The Chinese and Japanese societies could solve their problems without any similar sense of loss, as their ancient religions had been least concerned with the other world and transcendental reality. But the Islamic and the Hindu world have to strive for an authentic solution which could guarantee success as well as identity. The modern scientific age in the West represents the re-discovery of a classical past, and there was a social demand that Christianity adjust itself to it. The West could do that because its pre-Christian past was alive in its political institutions, art, philosophy and literature.

The problem is different for the Islamic world. The Islamic world does not have a common pre-Islamic past and even societies which have a rich pre-Islamic past can hardly succeed in rediscovering it as the acceptance of Islam meant for them a total or nearly total conversion to a new way of life and a new manner of looking at the world. Moreover, the pre-Islamic past of these societies did not have a rich scientific basis as the Greek past of the western countries had. The western world has had an unbroken identity from its Greco-Roman past till the present moment, but the Islamic world

gained a new identity after it embraced Islam. The problem of the Islamic world is to enter the new age of science without losing its identity, i.e., without renouncing its Islamic past. To preserve one's identity not only means preservation of the past, it also implies continuous growth in time. In a certain sense, the Islamic world lost its identity when the period of growth came to an abrupt end and it started imitating its own past. From this angle, the problem of the Islamic world is to regain its true identity by moving forward in time and by forcing a re-entry on the stage of history. Will it be able to derive inspiration from its past tradition and its religious outlook in this gigantic task? On the answer to this question depends the future of the Islamic world in the present moment of world history.

Islam is the youngest religion of the world, and also claims to be the last divinely guided religion. A few striking features of the Qur'anic metaphysics are to be noted for present discussion.

1. The Qur'an treats the invisible and the visible worlds as a continuum and not as two separate realms.
2. The Qur'an does not regard the visible world or the world of sense-experience as an illusion, nor as an evil, but regards it as true and real. The world of matter is treated as a challenge to be accepted by the faithful and as a stage of human activity. The Qur'an also regards sense-experience as a valid source of knowledge.
3. Similarly the world of events and the hereafter are regarded as a continuum. The world of events itself leads to the hereafter, and both provide stages, although in different manners, for the spiritual development of man.
4. The Qur'an regards time and history as real and believes in the irreversibility of time. Unlike some religions, it does not encourage the idea of rebirth or the possibility of man's re-entry in the world of events.
5. It believes in the law of causality so far as the world of events is concerned, which includes the human world and thus does not leave a gap between destiny and causality.
6. It encourages, even makes obligatory, the study of the physical world and the past history of mankind.
7. It discourages pseudo-sciences like astrology and regards the universe

as indifferent to human destiny.

8. It denies that there are intermediaries between God and the universe and thus makes possible a scientific study of the universe.

These few points are enough to suggest that the Qur'anic spirit is not anti-scientific; rather, it encourages scientific study of the universe and demands that man exploit the forces of nature for his own benefit.

Second, on the question of the status of man in this universe, the Qur'an takes an attitude, which is neither that of deification of man nor that of his complete insignificance in the scheme of existence. The Qur'an strikes at the root of human pride by reminding man of his humble origin; he is just a creature of God and a product of clay, which means that the entire creaturely order is a continuum, man only standing at the apex of it. Man is actually humble; yet he has great potentialities of development. It is up to him to rise or fall still lower in the order of existence. To save him from pride, the Qur'an repeatedly reminds us that he is finite and that death is always knocking at his door. Combined with the view of the irreversibility of time, it means that life is valuable and an occasion to be used, rather than to be wasted in idle talk or meaningless activities. It is in this aspect that life is a 'striving in the way of God'. In the Qur'anic vision of man, man is neither absolutely free nor are his liberty and dignity drowned in the ocean of divine omnipotence. He is free to act within the limits set by God, which means that the entire world is his stage of activity and he has to fix his gaze towards God, while finding his destiny on this planet. The moment he turns his eyes away from God, he becomes a source of evil in this world and forfeits his rights as the viceregent of God. God does not demand absolute surrender; what is demanded by him is a constant turning towards him. Man's feet are to be firmly rooted in the earth, while his eyes are to be fixed towards the ideal, the divine being. By this act of fixing his eyes towards the absolute, the world becomes permissible to him. Thus, he is neither to be afraid of anything nor is he to be disappointed. The Qur'an is, perhaps, the first Book, which makes 'despondency' a mark of disbelief. It is significant to note that Qur'an does not permit any artificial division of mankind into racial or ethnic groups. It divides mankind into those who accept the divine trust, who fix their gaze towards the absolute and those who trifle with life, reject the trust and who turn away from him.

Briefly stated, these are the metaphysical and sociological approaches of the Qur'an, and it is clear that the vision of Qur'an, if properly applied, leads to the re-awakening of human destiny. So long as the believers were led by this vision, they opened new possibilities of human development and freedom. It is this spirit and vision, which the Islamic world has to recapture in the modern world if it is to march forward, while keeping its identity intact. It is not the barren way of revivalism; it is, in the true sense, the way of rediscovery and recapturing the past. It will be the real moment of the Renaissance of the Islamic world. The western world did not revive its entire Greco-Roman past, which is historically impossible and a futile activity; it only rediscovered its essential past and could come out of the obscurantism of the Middle Ages. It is a matter of concern that the Islamic world has not been, so far, able to distinguish between revivalism and recapturing the past. It is still engaged in attempts at revival and, finding it impossible, curses the contemporary age for being wicked.

History offers challenges to living communities and individuals and it is the mark of a living being that he understands the movement of history and changes accordingly while retaining and preserving its real continuity and identity. It is true that the Book and the great prophetic tradition are the eternal courses of guidance for the believer in this changing world, but it has to be remembered that they are living guides and not lifeless models. The Prophet moved in history and transformed it; he made it obligatory that his followers continue this process of transformation. They did it for some time, but the moment they ceased to be creative and became imitators of their forefathers, they ceased to be a living force in history. It is a pity that terms which once meant creative thought and action, became in the course of time, synonyms of imitation. One such example is the term *fiqh*, which meant understanding and grasping a situation. *Fiqh*, which is the embodiment of Islamic creative thinking in the field of law, has now become a source of imitation, only because its followers forgot that no two moments of history are alike. True, there is good guidance for believers in the life of the Prophet, but what is eternal in the prophetic example is his gaze towards the eternal, when he was engaged in history. It is, perhaps, in this sense, that one has to follow the Prophet. The true followers of the Prophet can only be those who become a source of good for mankind and change the entire scheme of existence for the benefit of mankind. So long

as Muslims continue to think in terms of reviving an entire institutional life, which was once the achievement of the Islamic race, they will not be able to become a force in world history, because history has never been a witness to the success of such attempts at revival. The moment they became creative and turn towards the spirit of the Qur'an for guidance, they will emerge as a force. The possibilities of Islam have not been exhausted in the past. It will be the end of time, if this happens. The 'end of time' may be imminent, but till it does occur, our role as creative actors on the stage of history is not exhausted.

The situation of Muslims in India is still challenging. It is, perhaps, the first occasion in our history that we have to play our role as a minority in a state which calls itself secular, i.e., where politics have been separated from religion. The implications of this decision, to which we are also party, are far-reaching. Separation of politics from religion and minimalization of religion in public life are the only sensible solutions for a multireligious society like India, which is also impatient to change itself according to the demands of time. It must be made an irreversible decision. It means that we have an obligation to Indian society, and an obligation to our own faith and way of life. If we have to be a living community in India, which we are determined to be, we cannot be indifferent to either of these obligations. If we remain steadfast to the vision which the Qur'an gives us, we will be able to become a force and an agent in the process of social and intellectual change, which is slowly taking place in this country. We cannot keep our identity intact, particularly in this country, by clinging to the concessions which we were able to get from an alien rule, which wanted to keep us away from the rest of the Indian society. The ideal set before us by the Qur'an is to make the whole of humanity into one single indivisible community, and the multireligious society of India is the best stage for this historic mission. Muslims do not believe in the artificial divisions into which humanity has been divided by the folly of man. The Prophet said in unequivocal terms that the whole of humanity is the family of God and advised us that each of us has an obligation to the other. We have to strive to be the best community and to be the agents of good, and that is what is meant by a good Muslim and a good Indian in the present context. The Qur'an does not wish away the natural and historical divisions of mankind, it only calls upon us to be good and to compete in the way of goodness.

2



Man's Nature and Destiny: The Philosophic View in Islam

Man has been an object of study and theological discussions in the intellectual world of Islam since its early days. It was neither an accidental event, nor a result of cultural borrowing that man as a species (*insan*) and man as the prototype of humanity (*Adam*), is one of the constant themes in the Qur'an. The Qur'anic treatment of the subject being paradoxical, it led to varying and, quite often, mutually exclusive and contradictory interpretations in the works of theologians, *mufasssirun*, and speculative philosophers. For purposes of study we can arrange these interpretations in the following manner:

1. The early orthodox theological view, held by the Mu'tazilites.
2. The later Ash'arite orthodox view.
3. The Zahirite¹ view, which also includes legalistic schools.
4. The Neoplatonic philosophic view.
5. The Sufi-Illuminationist view, which also includes the esoteric Ismailiya²-Shi'a view.

The first three interpretations are outside the purview of the present study, but a brief sketch of their views is necessary as they represent the view of majority (*jamhur*) of the believers and also because the last two schools represent a powerful voice of dissent from them.

I

The early school of orthodoxy, the Mu'tazilites, emphasized moral freedom

and the responsibility of man, deriving their arguments from such verses of the Book which stress man's accountability and the justice (*`adl*) of Allah. The stumbling block for the Mu`tazilites were such verses of the Qur'an which emphasize the insignificance of man and the omnipotence of Allah. Being philosophically inclined, the Ash`arites could not dismiss the fact of felt freedom and were obliged to offer an ingenious explanation of the ultimate freedom in terms of 'acquisition' (*kasb*), metaphysically derived from the doctrine of 'occasionalism', the constant intervention of Allah in the life of cosmos and man. In this scheme man is reduced to an automaton, devoid of will, freedom, and even personality. Each moment he faces death and extinction, and the next moment is granted resurrection by the grace of Allah. The *mysterium tremendum* overpowers the *mysterium fascinosum*. Man stands trembling before God, and divine majesty leaves nothing except an awful feeling of 'creatureliness'. Man and cosmos do not possess any nature (*mahiyya*), as this word was understood by philosophers and the Mu`tazilites. In the recurring call of *kun* the entire cosmos is drowned; history is transformed into eschatology and destiny into divine contingency. Nothing is affirmed of man and nothing is denied to Allah, except the logical impossible. Even this courtesy to a logical category, i.e., the non-existence of the mutual 'contradictories', was dispensed with by the more consistent Zahirite thinker, Ibn Hazm, who asserted that even the logically impossible was not beyond and outside the omnipotence of Allah as nothing can limit his omnipotence. This attitude of absolute trembling before God is a moment of genuine introvert religiosity, and so far there was nothing wrong in this moment of Islamic religious thought. But the moment it became a world-outlook, a *weltanschauung*, it stunted the growth of Islamic speculative culture.

The legalistic schools held divergent views but so far as their theological attitudes towards man were concerned, they were almost unanimous in declaring the superiority of the legal category over the metaphysical and the eschatological. The identity of the secular and the sacred resulted in the latter being swallowed by the former; the horizontal dimension of man's being was over-emphasized at the expense of the vertical. This neglect of the vertical resulted ultimately in the complete negation of it. The point of intersection of the horizontal with the vertical, wherein lies the destiny of man, was lost sight of. A study of Islam in history reveals a fact of immense

importance for the study of the religious phenomena: laicization of religion does not ultimately lead to a secular approach in politics and general human life, instead it results in tyrannical theocracy, which happened in the history of Islam after the period of the al-Rashidun.³ Islam, under the leadership of its distinguished *fuqaha*, was desacralized to the extent that the relation between God and man was transformed into that of the ruler and the ruled, and ethics became a part of criminology. Temporal authority became a reflection of divine power, and man, as an individual and species, instead of being considered as a *Khalifa* or viceregent of God on earth, was supposed to be a passive spectator of the divine drama on earth and a mere recipient of the divine commandments as interpreted by the legalist and the expert. In a certain sense, divine authority was delegated to the earthly ruler and the interpreter of law, appointed by the ruler. It is not difficult to imagine that this scheme hardly leaves any room for individual responsibility and autonomous spiritual growth. It was not an accident of history that the early discussion of dogma gave place to legal hair-splitting, and theology or *ilm al-Din* was identified with law. Salvation, in this scheme, largely depends on the literal obedience to law, and motive or *niyya*, the life of the spirit, is relegated to the background.⁴

II

The fourth view of man, his nature and destiny, held by the Neo-platonists, particularly by al-Farabi and Ibn Sina, represents a mature reflection on the problem of man and his being. These philosophers accept the ‘consensus’ of the community that revelation, and not pure reason, is and ought to be the basis of reflection. The function of reason, according to them, is to reveal the meaning of revelation, which means that reason itself has a revelatory function. To say that reason is the essence of man is also to assert that man, as a species, has some sort of continuity with divine reason. Revelation in the form of the Book, i.e., the spoken word, is only one form of revelation, the revelation itself being the revelation of divine reason. This view is expressed in the doctrine, shared by al-Farabi and Ibn Sina, of the essential unity of reason and revelation. The cosmos and the human soul represent a scheme of gradual emanation, and, hence, man’s existence on

this earth is a fall as well as a striving upward to the divine centre. His association with matter is an instance of descent but his destiny is the highest realm. Man's earthly existence is both a tragedy and an occasion—a tragedy if he forgets his trans-historical origin and gets absorbed in history, losing his contact with eternity. The soul's travel upward is its travel homeward, made in a series of ascending stages, till the contact with the first intellect, or the holy spirit, the angelic form, is established, which is also the source of revelation. In this scheme, man is represented as the meeting point of all levels of reality, a microcosm. The highest stage of man's evolution is not a mere ideal, it becomes a fact in the personalities of the prophets and the *imams*. Man in his essential nature, *mahiyya*, is a celestial being and his destiny is the highest abode, a reflection of the beautiful names of Allah. In his poem on the soul, Ibn Sina describes man's ultimate destiny in thrilling lyrical form:

Why then was she cast down from her high peak
To this degrading depth? God brought her low,
But for a purpose wise, that is concealed
E'en from the keenest mind and liveliest wit,
And if the tangled mesh impeded her,
The narrow cage denied her wings to soar
Freely in heaven's high ranges, after all
She was a lightning flash that brightly glowed
Momently o'er the tents, and then was hid,
As though its gleam was ever glimpsed below.⁵

It is in this esoteric philosophy of Ibn Sina that the vertical dimension of man's being is stressed to such an extent that for the first time foundations of a spiritual anthropology are laid down in Islamic culture. In the philosophy of al-Farabi and Ibn Sina the intersection of the horizontal and the vertical dimensions of man's being become his destiny. Al-Farabi in his famous treatise, *Tahsil al-Sa`adah* and *al-Madinat al-Fazilah*, turns man's attention from a legalistic interpretation of Shariah to its ethical and spiritual sources. The importance of this attempt should not be underestimated just because the voice of the philosophers could not become the consensus of the *umma*. In the field of spirit, numerical adherence is

irrelevant, and what matters more is that communication between spirits is possible only in this language and not in the language of law.

III

In the Sufi poetry of Sanai,⁶ Attar⁷ and Rumi, this metaphysical outlook embodied in the passionate language of poetry and the vertical dimension becomes their sole concern. The Neoplatonic vision provides them a basis for the reconciliation of the sensuous with the spiritual, and the gap between the world of command and that of creatureliness, between *al-`Alam al-Amr* and *al-`Alam al-Khalq*, fills out. Man becomes a middle term between these two realms—in a *hadith* Allah speaks thus: ‘I was a hidden treasure, I loved to be known and I created the world’. Rumi describes it in the following manner:

David said: O Lord, since thou hast no need of us,
Say, then what wisdom was there in creating the two worlds?
God said to him: O temporal man, I was a hidden treasure,
I sought that the treasure of loving kindness and bounty should be revealed,
I displayed a mirror—its face the heart, its back the world—
Its back is better than its face—if the face is unknown to thee.⁸

This *hadith* becomes the dominant motif of Sufi literature and the Gnostic philosophy in Islam, and later gives rise to the rich idea of *insan al-Kamil*, the actualization of the hidden treasure, the archetypal reality of man, the ideal of human aspiration, and the trans-historical dimension of human existence. *Al-Insan al-Kamil* is the meeting point of history and eternity, as it represents the spiritual essence of prophecy, particularly the prophecy of Muhammad. The perfect man is also named ‘the reality of Muhammad’, *al-Haqiquat al-Muhammadiyya*. Man has to seek his destiny in this ideal, and in his approximation to it lies his spiritual salvation. This idea was not an innovation of Ibn al-`Arabi or Abdul Karim al-Jili.⁹ The entire gnostic-esoteric thought of Islam, initiated by al-Farabi, was moving towards the unfolding of this idea. It must be remembered here that the philosopher-

imam of al-Farabi is the highest gnostic being, the Khidr of Qur'anic symbolism.

Sufi thought had to pass through different stages to reach its doctrinal culmination in the mystical philosophy of Ibn al-'Arabi. So far as the concept of man is concerned, Sufi thought leaned towards moral asceticism which meant the complete negation and neglect of the horizontal dimension of human existence. In the poetic philosophy of Rumi, in spite of his general inclination towards the rejection of the sensible world, we find a concession to the sensible aspect of human personality as a glimpse, although transient, of the divine beauty. As the *jamal* (the beautiful) aspect of the divine, the *mysterium fascinosum*, gets more emphasis in Rumi. Love assumes the role of mediator between the highest reality and man. For the purpose of brevity, it has to be pointed out here that Sufi love is a synthesis of the Greek *eros*—so far as the sensible aspect is regarded as an expression of divine beauty—and the Christian *agape*—as it rises above the sensible and becomes man's love towards God and compassion towards other beings. For the first time, an authentic dialogical situation is offered, not merely on philosophical love but also on a much deeper level, the level of an authentic spiritual experience.

It was no less than a revolution in Islamic thought when Ibn al-'Arabi rejected the Neoplatonic scheme of emanation and declared the entire order of being, which of course includes the being of man, as an order of unceasing theophanies of God. Divine theophany is the *jalal*, the majesty, and the *jamal*, the beauty, at the same time. The entire order of being is an order of divine epiphanies.

IV

A phenomenological study of religious consciousness reveals that it cannot rest at the level of an absolute transcendence of the divine being, and unless there is a reconciliation of the transcendence and the immanence of God, a state of perpetual tension continues. In the absence of such a reconciliation it is also possible that man might fall into the sin of 'association' or *shirk*. Apart from other theological difficulties, uncompromising transcendence creates an impassable gulf between man and God: Man becomes an

insignificant creature, a mere automaton—the ultimate consequence of which Ash`arite theology had to face. The idea of divine manifestation in human form or a sensible medium has been found haunting the religious consciousness of man, to whichever religion he may belong. Islam could not remain an exception to this demand of religious consciousness. The development of the idea of the saint (*wali*) in Sufi literature and the concept of *imam* in the esoteric Shi`a proves this point, and, whatever the orthodox transcendentalist might say, it was not wholly un-Qur`anic as the Qur`anic symbolism of *Khidr* suggests. In the theosophic thought of Ibn al-`Arabi, the perfect saint of the Sufis and the *imam* of the esoteric Shi`aism are identified as a theophany of the divine being, *al-Insan al-Kamil*, the ideal and the prototype of humanity. Ibn al-`Arabi does not subscribe to the idea of either unique incarnation or the possibility of recurrent incarnation, as the symbolism of divine theophany meets the needs of a religious consciousness for divine manifestation, In fact the entire world of creation is regarded as a theophany of divine names.

A very important consequence of this idea, for the purpose of the present discussion, is the rejection of the extreme gnostic view that earthly existence is a form of evil. In *Fusus al-Hikam*, in the twenty-first Fass named after Zakariya, Ibn al-`Arabi declares: ‘Everything that exists is the object of God’s mercy’, *kullu maujudin martum*. The concept provides a relief against the common saying, supposed to be a *hadith*, of the Sufis, ‘Thine existence is a sin’ (*wujudak dhanbun*). According to Ibn al-`Arabi, the sufficient cause of the origination of things is divine compassion (*rahma*) which mediates between non-being and being. From the fullness of being, being alone will proceed. It means that man’s nature, *mahiyya*, lies in divine compassion. As man’s being is the theophany of God in his aspect of compassionate being, *Rabb*, it is incumbent upon man that he show compassion to others. Divine compassion is immanent in all existence and in the entire cosmic scheme. ‘*Farahmatullahi Filakwani mariyyatun wa Fizzawati-wal-`aiyani jariyyatun*’.¹⁰ He notes:

When Compassion arises in you and through you, show it to others. You are at once compassionate (*Rahim*) and object of Compassion (*Marhum*) and that is how your essential unity with God is achieved.¹¹

It will be interesting to point out here that in spite of the ontological and also the felt unity with the divine being, Ibn al-`Arabi did not support al-Hallaj's declaration 'I am the Truth' (*ana al-Haq*). Instead he recommends 'I am the secret of *Haq*' (*ana Sirr al-Haq*). This scheme results in a serious situation where the Godhead would be neither divine nor a sovereign lord. Henry Corbin, in *Creative Imagination*, notes:

Without the Godhead (*haq*) which is the cause of being, and equally without the creature (*khalq*), i.e., without us who are the cause of God's manifestation, the structure of being would not be what it is, and *haq* would be neither *haq* nor *rabb*.

The foregoing discussion makes it clear that man's destiny, i.e., *marifa*, is linked with his nature and his nature of *mahiyya* is to be sought in his divine origin. Ibn al-`Arabi and Rumi reach the identical conclusion that, in the words of Rumi, 'our destination is Divine Majesty' (*mauzil-e ma kibriyast*). Both agree on the point that man could reach this destination through love. Love mediates between the sensible and the spiritual and results in the complete transformation of human personality. It is spiritual love which makes the intersection of the divine and the human possible.

This idea of the intersection of the two dimensions of human existence gets a wider significance in the poetic-philosophic vision of Iqbal, the twentieth-century exponent of the mystic vision of Islam. The differences between the outlooks of Ibn al-`Arabi and Iqbal have been over-emphasized by contemporary Islamic scholarship. Though we cannot here enter into a discussion on this, one important point to be remembered is that Rumi is the connecting link between Iqbal and Ibn al-`Arabi. According to Iqbal too, the universe cannot be regarded as an independent reality standing in opposition to God.¹² Like Ibn al-`Arabi, Iqbal too feels that reality is essentially spirit, and quotes the medieval Iranian gnostic visionary, Shihab ud-Din as-Suhrawardi or al-Maqtul, to prove his point that there are degrees of this spirit.¹³ He also affirms that, strictly speaking, only that is real which is directly conscious of its own reality.¹⁴ In the order of being, it is God and then man who are, in varying degrees, conscious of their reality. Consciousness is the nature of man and complete self-consciousness is his destiny. This self-consciousness is not a mere intellectual principle; it is, for

Iqbal, the total act of human personality, the highest form of which is the prophetic ascension, *mi`raj*. In *Javid Nama*, Iqbal makes it clear that ‘ascension’ is nothing but the expansion and transformation of consciousness. In Iqbalian symbolism, ascension signifies man’s love towards God and God’s longing for man. God and man, although ontologically not identical and existentially distinct, are not mutually exclusive beings and each needs the other. Man realizes his destiny through love of God, and in turn, God shows a passionate search for man. The contemporary significance of Iqbal, so far as man’s destiny is concerned, lies in this significant point that in Iqbal’s poetry and thought man comes of age without God suffering death.

¹ Editor’s note: Zahirites or the Zahiriya (‘Literalists’) are followers of an Islamic legal school that insisted on strict adherence to a literal (*zahir*) interpretation of the Qur’an and the *hadith* as the only source of Muslim law. Founded in Iraq by Dawud Khalaf in the ninth century, it spread to Iran, northern Africa and Spain, where the philosopher Ibn Hazm was its chief exponent. Although it was strongly attacked by orthodox theologians, the Zahirite school nevertheless survived for about 500 years and later seems to have merged with the Hanbaliya.

² Editor’s note: Ismailiya or Ismailis are a religiously and politically schismatic group of the Shi’ite Batiniya. This school, which gained currency during the eighth century, interprets religious texts exclusively on the basis of their hidden, or inner (*batin*) rather than their literal meanings. The Ismailis believed that beneath every obvious or literal meaning of a sacred text lay a secret, hidden meaning, which could be arrived at through *ta`wil* or allegorical interpretation.

³ Editor’s note: Al-Rashidun (‘Rightly Guided’ or ‘Perfect’), a collective noun referring to the first four caliphs, or *khalifa*, of the Islamic community, the last of whom was ‘Ali (d. 661). The twenty-nine year rule of the Rashidun was Islam’s first experience without the leadership of Muhammad. The Rashidun thus assumed all of Muhammad’s duties, except the Prophetic: as *imams*, they led the congregation in prayer at the mosque; as *khatibs*, they delivered the Friday sermon; and as *umara` al-mu`minin* (‘commander of the faithful’), they commanded the army. The Rashidun effected the expansion of the Islamic state beyond Arabia into Iraq, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, Iran and Armenia. They were also responsible for the adoption of the Islamic calendar, the Hejira, dating from Muhammad’s emigration (*hijrah*) from Mecca to Medina (622). It was also a controversy over ‘Ali’s succession that split Islam into two sects: the Sunnis (traditionalists) and the Shi’ites (*shi`at` Ali*, ‘party of Ali’), which continues to date, with added complexities over the centuries.

⁴ Incidentally al-Bukhari starts with the *hadith* ‘Actions depend on motives, or intention’.

Editor's note: Abu Abdullah Muhammad Ibn al-Bukhari (d. 870), or Shah or Sahih Bukhari, who, sifting through a reportedly 600,000 corpus, compiled and classified a collection of *hadiths* in his monumental *Al-Jami` al-Sahih* ('The Sound Epitome').

[5](#) A.J. Arberry's translation, cited from 'Ibn Sina: His Life and Times', in his *Avicenna: Philosopher and Scientist* (London: Luzac and Co., 1952).

[6](#) Editor's note: Sanai or Sana'i (d. 1131?) is the pseudonym of Abu al-Majd Majdud Ibn Adam, the author of what is regarded as the first great mystical Sufi poem in the Persian language. His best known work is *Hadiqat al-haqiqah wa shari'at at-tariqah* ('The Garden of Truth and the Law of the Path') which expresses his ideas on God, love, philosophy and reason in about 10,000 couplets. He was one of the first to use verse forms such as the *qasidah* (ode), *ghazal* (lyric) and *masnavi* (rhymed couplet).

[7](#) Editor's note: Farid ud-Din Attar (d. 1220), Persian poet held to be one of the greatest Muslim mystical poets and thinkers, wrote at least 45,000 distichs (couplets) and many brilliant prose works. The greatest of his works is the well-known *Mantaq al-Tair* ('The Conference of the Birds'), an allegorical poem describing the quest of the birds (Sufis) for the mystical Seemurgh, whom they wish to crown their king (God) only to realize in the end that they and the Seemurgh are one. Other important works include *Elahi nama* ('Divine Book'), *Mosibat nama* ('Book of Affliction'), *Divan* ('Collected Poems') and *Tazkirat al-Auliya'*, an invaluable book for information on the early Sufis.

[8](#) Jalal ud-Din Rumi, *Selected Poems from Diwan-e Shams-e Tabriz*, ed. and trans. with an introduction, notes and appendices by R.A. Nicholson (Bethesda, Md: Ibex, 1999), poem iv.

[9](#) Editor's note: Abdul Karim al-Jili, also known as `Abd al-Karim Qutb ud-Din Ibn Ibrahim al-Jili (d. 1424), was a mystic whose work clearly shows the influence of Ibn al-'Arabi; his doctrine of the 'perfect man' became popular throughout the Islamic world. Al-Jili maintained that the perfect man can achieve unity with the divine being, a unity experienced by prophets from Adam to Muhammad. At this highest level of being (*wujud*), all contradictions such as being and non-being are resolved. The perfect man is thereby a channel through which the community could enjoy contact with the divine being.

[10](#) Ibn al-'Arabi, 'Fass Zakariyya' in *Fusus al-Hikam*, ed., by Abu'al-'Ala 'Afifi (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-Arab, 1966).

[11](#) Cited from Henry Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*, trans., Ralph Manheim (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969).

[12](#) Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934; Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 1994), p. 62.

[13](#) Ibid. p. 67.

[14](#) Ibid. p. 68.

Al-Ghazali's Repudiation of Causality: The Destruction of Philosophical Enquiry in Islam

Al-Ghazali and Ibn Taymiya are the two powerful forces who have determined the philosophical and theological attitudes of the majority of Muslims for hundreds of years. These two powerful theologians represent two divergent, and on certain points mutually exclusive, world-outlooks and yet Muslim orthodoxy was able to make them its two pillars. It might be that one of the reasons of the split mind of the Muslim orthodoxy is due to this fact of two exclusive sources. In this brief article, an attempt is made to examine the 'unique' contribution of al-Ghazali to Islamic thought which consists of his repudiation of the causal principle. This repudiation of the causal principle has become so much a part of the Muslim mind that there are sufficient reasons to believe that what is called the fatalistic attitude of an average Muslim owes its origin to it. It is on this account that some modern Arab thinkers feel that the stagnation of the Muslim world is caused by al-Ghazali's repudiation of causality. One bold writer of the modern Arab-world, al-Qusaimi, is of the opinion that the Muslim world cannot enter the age of enlightenment unless it rejects the al-Ghazalian world-outlook. Indian writers on Islamic thought are, however, still under the spell of al-Ghazali and go to the extent of comparing him to scientific philosophers like Hume and Kant, as if long ago al-Ghazali had anticipated them. There is nothing wrong in comparing the philosophers of two different cultures and even two historical times if this comparison proves that the areas of study of the philosophers being compared have something in common. A careful study of al-Ghazali shows that he was a fatalist in ethics, an obscurantist in his philosophical method and a justifier of status quo in his political theory. All these elements of his thought proceed from

his philosophical method which is examined below.

Al-Ghazali undoubtedly occupies a paradoxical position in the history of Islamic philosophy. He is the acknowledged leader of orthodox Islam. It was he who gave a final and decisive blow to Islamic scholastic philosophy based on Aristotelian and Neoplatonic sources. This was such a decisive blow that philosophy ceased to remain a respectable term in the Islamic world and even powerful counter arguments by Ibn Rushd were not able to revive the respectability once attached to philosophy. Posterity remembers al-Ghazali as presenting the 'argument of Islam', and he is still the unchallenged leader of orthodoxy in almost the whole of the Islamic world. Ash`arism could not have become the official theoretical system of the majority of Muslims had it not received the powerful advocacy of al-Ghazali. It was one of the 'achievements' of al-Ghazali that he closed the gap between the Sufi way and orthodox theological doctrine. Al-Ghazali represents that rare combination of a theologian and a mystic in the history of Islamic civilization. No other person, before or after him, could achieve this distinction of being equally acceptable to both the mystics and the theologians. He gave to theology a mystic orientation and to mysticism a theological foundation. Till then, theologians were distrustful of the mystics because the latter were suspected of compromising the idea of the transcendence of God, and the mystics were not too friendly with the theologians because they considered them to be too preoccupied with the idea of transcendence at the expense of the felt proximity of the divine with his creatures. Al-Ghazali presented a world view which reconciled the basic attitudes of these divergent groups, and by this reconciliation helped the Islamic civilization resolve its crisis at one of the most critical moments of its history when the collapse of the glorious age had left no scope for worldly hope. As it will be suggested later, this resolution, while it established the orthodox position, gave a fatal blow to a scientific spirit among subsequent generations of Muslims. The law of compensation so works in nature and history that nothing valuable is gained without losing something equally or more valuable.

Al-Ghazali, who owes his eminence to the repudiation of philosophers, completes the world-picture given by the Ash`arites. The Ash`arites' world view can conveniently be defined as occasionalistic. Reality was conceived as discontinuous and consisting of discrete events having no necessary

internal relations, coming into existence and perishing at each moment at the will of God. This occasionalistic metaphysics, with its theory of indivisible atoms and accidents, had made all secondary agents superfluous and philosophically irrelevant. The universe is created, according to this view, at each moment by the direct will of God. There is only one existent in the true sense of the term and that is the almighty God; the other existents acquire the accident of existence (existence and non-existence—extinction—are considered accidents by Ash`arites as well as by al-Ghazali) by the decree of God at each moment of existence and remain in existence so long as God wills to bestow upon atoms the attribute of existence, and cease to exist as soon as this attribute of existence is removed or the contrary attribute of extinction (*fana*) is attributed to them. In this metaphysics of continuous creation, the notion of continuous extinction was also implied. There could be no place here for persistence of an object or the notion of substance. The notion of substance was attacked by the Ash`arites in an unparalleled manner in the history of philosophy not for speculative reasons or on scientific grounds, but for purely theological reasons—the impossibility of uninterrupted divine activity in an ordered world where there is a reign of law. In a discontinuous world the necessity of secondary agents would also vanish and there would be left nothing except Allah. The moment the efficacy of the secondary agents is repudiated, the principle of causality pertaining to the world of events becomes superfluous. The Ash`arite theologians demolished the ‘philosophers’ view’ but could not construct a metaphysics of their own.

Al-Ghazali laid down a theoretical foundation for their world view. His repudiation of causality was an essential part of this ‘grand design’. The proposition that God alone is the creative agent was an unproven premise of the Ash`arites. The world could remain discontinuous and could be presented as a series of broken events without postulating a creative cause. The assertion of the Ash`arites that God is the only creative agent was not logically necessary. One of the motives of the Ash`arite thinkers in constructing an atomistic universe and demolishing the complex structure of the world was to make miracles possible. The inconceivability of miracles was one of the inescapable conclusions of the Mu`tazilites, the predecessors of Ash`arites who believed in an ordered world. To preserve all the different moments of the Qur`anic revelation, some of them

incompatible with each other and logically exclusive, was the chief passion of the Ash`arites. Constancy of the cosmic order and the absolute omnipotence of God are such apparently incompatible moments of the Qur`anic revelation. Does divine wisdom limit divine omnipotence, or, to put it in a slightly different way, does the divine love for order restrict his unlimited will? While the Ash`arites did not deny that constancy is a striking feature of the universe, they insisted that miracles also happen, i.e., sometimes the reign of law is interrupted. It was for the explanation of the 'exceptional' that a theory undermining the continuity of the world was evolved by the ingenious Ash`arites. Al-Ghazali and the Ash`arites did not deny that the world appears as continuous; what they denied was that this continuity is an inherent feature of this world. Their position was that continuity proves the grace of God and that miracles establish his omnipotence. A theory was needed which could save appearance and which did not necessitate the reduction of one divine attribute into another. These ontological considerations have to be kept in mind for the understanding of al-Ghazali's repudiation of causality. He needed a theory of knowledge or an epistemological foundation for the justification of his preconceived ontology. For this purpose he tried to assert that certitude in knowledge is possible outside scientific and philosophical methods.

Describing his quest for certainty, in his autobiographical *al-Munqidh min ad-dalal* ('Deliverance from Error'), he notes: I therefore said within myself: To begin with, what I am looking for

is knowledge of what things really are, so I must undoubtedly try to find what knowledge really is. It was plain to me that sure knowledge is that knowledge in which the object is disclosed in such a fashion that no doubt remains along with it, that no possibility of error or illusion accompanies it; that the mind cannot even entertain such a supposition.¹

He goes on to clarify this point that certain knowledge must also be infallible. Simple mathematical propositions alone are infallible propositions which are discovered by the human mind. Propositions relating to the facts of experience can never attain that sort of certainty which can be granted to mathematical propositions. So far as the criterion of infallibility is concerned no proposition can claim to be as infallible as the divine

injunction. The consequence is inescapable: metaphysics is impossible. The fallacy of al-Ghazali is quite clear: first he puts an impossible condition of infallibility, then he comes to the obvious conclusion that, as all knowledge pertaining to the physical world contains an element of sense-experience, no such knowledge can be trustworthy.

Nature as ultimately intelligible is somehow related to the postulate of causality. In all scientific and philosophical thinking, a transition from the order of thought to the order of being is implicit. The notion that thought reveals the structure of reality has remained a postulate of all scientific thinking. This notion in no way denies the finitude of human thought; on the contrary it asserts it, as it is believed that thought progressively reveals the order of reality. What al-Ghazali denies is that thought can partially reveal the structure of reality. All transition from the order of being is illegitimate for al-Ghazali, and, as the necessary connection between cause and effect falls under this scheme, causality as an ontological principle becomes illegitimate. What is actually being denied by this notion, whether it is the notion of causality itself or the affirmation of a necessary relation between a particular event called a cause and another event called an effect, is very important. Al-Ghazali does not appear to be very clear on this point. He writes, at the opening of his seventeenth question, that

the correlation between what is wont to be taken as cause and what is wont to be taken as effect is not necessary according to us. For any two entities, neither of which is the other, nor the affirmation or the negation of the other, are not necessarily concomitant as regards the existence of one or the other; like the quenching of thirst and drinking, etc.²

That al-Ghazali does not object to the notion of necessity itself is quite clear from the above quotation. He holds the view that the notion of necessity shall be confined to logical categories, and causality is not a logical category because the notion of cause does not entail the notion of effect. The only significant proof which he offers is that the necessity of a causal relationship is rooted in the psychological habit of associating ideas or events on the strength of their proximity. Al-Ghazali appears to anticipate the argument of Hume on this point. The only evidence which can be brought to the claim of necessity, according to al-Ghazali, is experience. He

goes on to add that experience does not tell us anything about the necessary relation between cause and effect; what we are told is that the so-called effect occurs with the cause and through it. The events involve a relation of contemporaneousness and not dependence. The arguments of Hume and al-Ghazali are almost identical on these points. Hume too made a distinction between propositions of facts and propositions with regard to abstract concepts such as those of mathematics. The contradiction of the latter is not possible whereas contradiction of the former is possible. Hume and al-Ghazali both agree that from an observation of particular events a universal inference cannot be made and that all inference from the past to the future is invalid and unjustifiable. Both deny any status to inductive reasoning. The similarity is very striking, but it does not result in an identical conclusion. Al-Ghazali comes nearer to Cartesian occasionalists like Malebranche³ than to Hume, and therein lies the methodological difference of the two thinkers. It is an example of the convergence of opposites rather than a meeting of the identical. Hume denies causality because he thinks that this concept involves a reference to some occult force supposedly belonging to the causal agent, and experience does not warrant such an assumption. Hume is a thoroughgoing empiricist and takes empirical premises to the limit of denying the grounds of experience itself. As Iqbal has pointed out, Hume's denial of causality belongs to the history of science.⁴ Al-Ghazali's denial, on the contrary, belongs to the history of theology. Hume, in a sense, defies experience and refuses to go beyond it. His epistemology does not lead to any ontological doctrine. It, rather, demolishes all ontological presuppositions of human thought. Hume denies any philosophic status to revealed scripture or authority. Hume's philosophy is one of the possible manifestations of humanism inherent in the post-medieval civilization.

Al-Ghazali, on the contrary, repudiates causality to establish the occasionalistic doctrine. Causality is denied a place in the world of events and transferred to almighty Allah. Allah is the only agent. To call him the primary agent would not be sound because the term 'primary' implies the term 'secondary'. There is one causal principle and that is God and his absolute, omnipotent, creative power. Al-Ghazali's concession to mathematical and logical necessity is not compatible with his occasionalistic doctrine. Does not this necessity limit divine omnipotence?

Why is not a world conceivable where mathematical principles are violated? Why cannot Allah do the logically impossible? Al-Ghazali made some concessions to logic and mathematics, but later theologians like Ibn Hazm made a justifiable assertion that there is nothing impossible for God, even the logically impossible. For Hume, all propositions are synthetic, and for al-Ghazali there can be no proposition, if the occasionalistic world-outlook and the repudiation of causality are studied together. There can be no possible predication because there is neither a S(subject) nor a P(predicate). There is only one subject and that is God. The universe singularly and collectively is the predicate of God. The so-called subject is itself a predicate. Each occurrence in the universe, the natural world, is immediately a predicate of divine activity. God is the only subject. Al-Ghazali did not repudiate the principle of causality, but repudiated the doctrine that things possess causal characteristics. Al-Ghazali might have remained on solid ground if he had doubted that there was a necessary relation between a particular event called a cause and another particular event called an effect; but in denying the very principle of causality for the natural order of events, which Kant rightly pointed out was the proper locus of causality, and in transferring it to God, he was going beyond the limits of his own method. The conclusion that God alone is the immediate cause of all events is not justified by the process of his thinking, because the principle of causality is not one of the presuppositions of his philosophy. A repudiation of causality leads to the conclusion of an absurd world and to save the universe from absurdity he postulates a God. To one who is convinced of his repudiation of causality, miracles appear quite possible—even ‘necessary’, but consistency would require him to believe that the miracle is not merely exceptional; what is called by common sense an ordered world and a continuous system of events is itself a miracle. Is it less than a miracle that an omnipotent Allah permits the world to have a regular sequence? It is no wonder, then, that a civilization which accepts al-Ghazali will patiently wait for miracles to happen and leave everything to Allah.

¹ Al-Ghazali, ‘Deliverance from Error’, in *The Faith and Practice of al-Ghazali*, trans., Montgomery Watt (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1953), pp. 21–22.

² Cited in Majid Fakhry, *Islamic Occasionalism and its Critique by Averroes and Aquinas* (London:

George Allen and Unwin, 1958), pp. 61–63.

³ Editor's note: Nicolas Malebranche (1638–1715), French Roman Catholic priest and theologian, who sought to synthesize Cartesianism with the thought of St Augustine and with Neoplatonism. Central to his Occasionalism is the notion that human knowledge of both the internal and the external world is not possible except as the result of a relation between man and God. Changes are caused, not by individuals or objects, but by God. What are commonly called 'causes' are merely 'occasions' on which God acts to produce effects. His major works are *De la recherche de la verite*, 3 vols, ('Search After Truth'), *Traite de la nature et de la grace* ('Treatise of Nature and Grace'), *Entretiens sur la metaphysique et sur la religion* ('Dialogues on Metaphysics and on Religion'), *Meditations chretrennes* ('Christian Meditations') and *Traite de morale* ('A Treatise of Morality').

⁴ Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934; Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 1994), p.186.

The Meaning of Reason in the Systems of al-Farabi and Ibn Sina

The meaning of 'reason' in the philosophical speculation of the Islamic philosophers in general and al-Farabi and Ibn Sina in particular is largely determined by the presupposition of epistemological unity, speculative reason and divine revelation. This presupposition runs throughout their systems and acts as its basis. In a sense, this was the presupposition of the entire Jewish-Christian theology which preceded the Islamic tradition of philosophical speculation. The introduction of revealed religions in the pagan Graeco-Roman philosophical culture had brought a new tension, a tension between the authority of reason and revealed authority. Greek epistemological inquiry had already faced a tension on account of the contradictory claims of sense-experience and reason which was finally resolved in the Platonic system by assigning to them two different realms of reality; to the former the realm of becoming and change and to the latter the realm of the intelligible. In the definition of knowledge, the exclusive function of reason, as recollection, an idea of mystical awakening, was also hidden. In the speculation of Democritus, the great upholder of the authority of reason as against sense-experience, any possibility of mystical awakening was excluded and reason was identified with mere rational consideration, i.e., judgement by argument. Plato opens the possibility of reason appearing as a sudden illumination, a 'kindling of light as from a leaping spark'. Aristotle too admitted the possibility of someone hitting upon the middle term without formulating a complete syllogism in his mind. Revelation as a mode of knowledge was, however, explicitly mentioned by the Stoics. Thus the philosophical bases of the unity of reason and revelation were given in the Platonic system, in the Stoic doctrine that

right knowledge is implanted in the human soul by God, and, finally, in the Neoplatonic idea that the rational soul is an emanation from world-reason. The Stoic idea of man partaking in the world-reason or logos made it philosophically possible to accommodate revelation. In the Neoplatonic and Stoic doctrines, reason was not only a source of knowledge, it had also obtained an ontological status as an emanation from the world-soul. In this philosophical atmosphere, the Jewish-Christian idea of divine revelation as the unfolding of divine reason could easily be absorbed in the philosophical movement. Stoic and Neoplatonic philosophical systems allowed for some sort of mystical illumination as a higher form of discursive reason but could not account for the authority of historical persons to whom or through whom divine reason is expressed; this authority is considered as essentially identical or intellectually compatible with true individual human reason. In the idea of the essential unity of reason and the revelatory knowledge possessed by a historical authority, a new tension is involved, a tension between authority expressive of divine reason and individual human reason which is called upon to accept authority as the ultimate criterion of reason itself. This cannot be called as necessarily latent in the Stoic and Neoplatonic idea of the essential unity of reason and revelation as an 'awakening'. The early Jewish-Christian philosophical tradition ultimately resolved this tension by giving to reason a secondary place which was repeated at the later stage of Islamic philosophico-theological speculation, particularly by al-Ghazali. In the Islamic philosophical tradition, al-Farabi and Ibn Sina resolve this tension not by reducing the one into the other but by treating pure reason—the capacity to apprehend the essences of things—as essentially identical with prophetic revelation. This identity is sought by giving to theoretical reason an ontological status in the scheme of being and by deriving revelation from the same source. Thus, the essential identity of reason and revelation lies in their common ontological source. The common ontological source is the 'active intellect'. There is not much originality in the derivation of the individual and of prophetic reason from an active intellect. The scheme had already been worked out by the Neoplatonists and Stoics. The originality of al-Farabi lies in closing the gap between two apparently distinct sources of knowledge—reason and revelation—in a manner that, without losing their specific character, they are united at a higher epistemological level. The function of reason, according to the

Platonic-Aristotelian scheme accepted by al-Farabi, is to grasp the essences of things and to acquire the knowledge of pure being through successive stages of reasoning. Revealed knowledge is, on the contrary, immediate, and is reached by a sudden illumination either by the awakening of the soul or by an external divine agency. There is one more difference, a crucial one. Knowledge obtained through reason is exact, self-consistent, and the different stages of reasoning are linked together by the necessary laws of thought, whereas knowledge through revelation lacks exactness and continuity and is communicated through similes, metaphors and symbols. Derivation of these types of knowledge will not be of much help unless the distinctions are properly explained and some of them regarded as contingent. This is precisely what has been done by al-Farabi and later by Ibn Sina. Al-Farabi grants immediacy to rational knowledge, a characteristic of revelation, and regards the symbolic and the metaphorical communication of revelation as contingent, which also involves the intentionality of the recipient of the revelation according to the differences between the addressees.

According to al-Farabi, rational capacity, possessed by all human beings capable of receiving illumination from an active intelligence, is called the 'potential intellect'. The potential intellect, after it has received light from the active intelligence, abstracts the universal or 'intelligibles' from sensible objects, which later become actual existents in the world of reality and assume an ontological status. To these intelligibles thus abstracted and transferred into actualities, he gives the name of active intellect. This active intellect in its aspect of being self-intelligible, or self-conscious, is called 'acquired intellect' (*aql Mustafad*). Ontologically, acquired intellect is only a step further from active intelligence. It is the pure form enjoying complete bliss and gaining immortality. The influence of the Neoplatonic Alexandrian school is quite obvious here, but the later conclusions which al-Farabi derives are interesting and throw light on his religio-philosophical motives. The evolution of a potential intellect is a normal phenomenon within the reach of ordinary human beings, which means that normal philosophizing (i.e., cognition) of universals, is a common human activity. But the rational faculty does not reach its perfection unless it attains to the higher level of acquired intellect. It is the stage when the rational faculty of the soul becomes self-operative and is prepared for a further evolution

which lies in the actual contemplation of the active intellect itself. At this stage ‘reality’ is illumined and the soul conceives ‘pure forms’. It is rational activity par excellence, which is nearer to intention or inspiration than normal discursive reasoning.¹ When this stage is reached in the life of a person he is called a ‘perfect philosopher’ (*al-fayalsuf-al-kamil*) or an *imam* or a prophet. Before we proceed further, his important conclusions, which are obvious enough, are to be noted. First, al-Farabi tries to establish a continuity between rational activity and prophetic revelation and, second, regards philosophical activity as the basis of prophetic revelation. Further, this evolution, although logically possible for any reasoning soul, is a contingent fact, i.e., it involves divine grace. However, it does not mean that prophetic activity is epistemologically higher than philosophical activity. On the contrary, philosophical activity, being the generic term, is higher than the former and in fact precedes it in time.² Philosophy—the cognition of the essences of all things—is ‘the superior science’³ and religion becomes an imitation of philosophy. Al-Farabi asserts the essential identity of philosophy and religion in unequivocal terms:

Both comprise the same subjects and both give an account of the ultimate principles of the beings. For both supply knowledge about the first principles and cause of the beings, and both give an account of the ultimate end for the sake of which man is made—i.e., Supreme-happiness—and the ultimate end of every one of the other beings.⁴

It becomes quite clear that philosophical activity consists in the cognition of principles governing the realm of essences and that religious knowledge aims precisely at the same end. If al-Farabi had concluded his speculation at this point he would have become a mere apologetic of religion. But, like the philosopher he is, he wants to offer sufficient reason for the phenomenal non-identity of religion and philosophy. It is on this point that al-Farabi shows his originality and refuses the seduction of simple reductionism. Continuing his argument about essential identity, he explains the reason for phenomenal non-identity. He explains:

In everything of which philosophy gives an account based on intellectual perception or conception, religion gives an account based on imagination.

In everything demonstrated by philosophy, religion employs persuasion. Philosophy gives an account of the ultimate principles [i.e., the essence of the first principles and the essences of the incorporeal second principles (heavenly bodies)] as they are perceived by the intellect. Religion sets forth their images by means of the similitude of them taken from corporeal principles and imitates them by their likeness among political offices. ... And [religion] attempts to bring the similitudes of these things as close as possible to their essences. Also in everything of which philosophy gives an account that is demonstrative and certain, religion gives an account based on persuasive arguments. Finally philosophy is prior to religion in time.⁵

An analysis of the above comment suggests that rational activity acts at two levels: one, the higher level, is the essential rational activity which consists in the knowledge of the essences of being, and two, the communication of this knowledge to those who are not endowed with the gift of intellectual comprehension, that is the general humanity whose aim is also the attainment of happiness. Al-Farabi describes religion, a very telling phrase, as ‘popular philosophy’. What al-Farabi is trying to explain is the ‘historical reason’ behind the principles which are themselves ahistorical; what he is trying to account for is the transformation of the essential into the contingent. If we examine the statement ‘philosophy is prior to religion in time’ in the light of another statement: ‘the idea of *imam*, Philosopher, and Legislator is a single idea’,⁶ the implication is clear, that the true prophet is no other person than the true philosopher and that the prophet, before he is a prophet, is a philosopher and that this precedence is not merely logical, it is also chronological. Al-Farabi cannot be considered so naïve as to have thought that the ‘philosopher’ deliberately translates his conceptual knowledge into the language of ‘poetry’ to make it palatable for the multitude. If we try to understand these statements in the light of his doctrine of intellect, outlined above, a probable explanation occurs. Truth, which consists in the knowledge of intelligibles, dawns on the human psyche in the form of an ‘illumination’ which is capable of being communicated either through demonstration or through symbolic forms. The former is the way of philosophy and the latter that of religion. The idea

that truth is revealed through illumination and that reason is not opposed to intention, which rises above the distinctions of serial time, was not unknown to al-Farabi, as is clear from the following passage:

It is not impossible that when a man's imaginal power reaches extreme perfection so that he receives in his waking life from the Active Intelligence a knowledge of present and future facts or of their sensible symbols and also receives the symbols of immaterial intelligibles and of the higher immaterial existents and indeed sees all these—it is not impossible that he becomes a prophet giving news of the Divine Realm, thanks to the intelligibles he has received.⁷

This idea that reason in man can operate at a level higher than discursive reason becomes more articulate in the philosophical thought of Ibn Sina. According to him, potential intellect commonly shared by all human beings is itself a non-corporeal and an immortal substance. It is an emanation of the active intelligence, and, therefore, its highest form, acquired intellect (*aql Mustafad*) is its development. Closely akin to this acquired intellect is the prophetic intellect which shares the essential quality of possessing the knowledge of the intelligibles or the essences of beings. So far, he is in broad agreement with al-Farabi, but he tries to close the gap between philosophical reason and prophetic reason by enlarging the definition of reason itself. Ibn Sina does not regard it essential that reasoning must necessarily be piecemeal. According to him, reality is grasped and intelligibles are apprehended in an intuitive moment, as a sudden happening not necessarily preceded by a process of logical arguing. Ibn Sina admits the possibility of obtaining truth without a formal syllogistic reasoning. The description of this intuitive moment reminds one of the Bergsonian 'duration', but there is one significant difference. Bergson starts with the incompatibility of 'intuition' and 'intellect' and is, therefore, never able to reconcile these moments of the human psyche. Ibn Sina does not regard them as opposites or as incompatible. To him, on the contrary, intuition is itself a higher form of reasoning. He could only do it by giving to reason an ontological basis. He, no doubt, followed the Neoplatonic tradition, but worked out his scheme in a manner that new possibilities were opened. To a possible question, why this sudden grasp of reality results in one instance in

regular syllogistic reasoning and in another instance in prophetic revelation, Ibn Sina, like al-Farabi, gives a psychological answer based on a speculative study of human types. If the recipient is endowed with a highly developed imaginative power, he transforms this intention into symbolic and metaphorical language, which can be interpreted in different ways, again, according to the intellectual endowment of the secondary recipient.

To the possible question as to why this occurs in certain cases, Ibn Sina's answer can be found in his classification of beings under the rubric of the necessary and the possible. All that occurs is merely possible, and the being of God, the ground of existence, alone is necessary. Rationalism often gives a deterministic picture of the world, but, Ibn Sina, like Leibniz in later western philosophy, escapes deterministic conclusion by allowing room for contingency. The entire universe along with human reason is contingent, The being of God, the source of reason in the universe, alone is necessary. Thus, at the end, his philosophy becomes a 'religious philosophy' without becoming obscurantist.

¹ Al-Farabi, *Al-Madinat-al-Fazila*, cited in Fazlur Rahman ed., *Prophecy in Islam*, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1958), p. 52.

² Al-Farabi, *Tahsil al-Sa'adah* (Hyderabad: Dairat al-Ma arif, n.d.), p. 41.

³ Ibid., p. 38.

⁴ Ibid., p. 40.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 40–41.

⁶ Al-Farabi, *Al-Madinat-al-Fazila*, pp. 37, 38.

⁷ Al-Farabi, *Al-Madinat-al-Fazila*.

Eastern Aristotelians and Time

The problem of time has been one of the most significant problems in the history of Islamic philosophy. The interest that these thinkers evinced in the subject was caused not only by speculative motives; it had for them immense religious and theological significance. It is probable that this concern with time was a major consequence of the clash between the Graeco-Roman and prophetic visions of the world. It is, however, certain that they inherited the problem from their Greek masters, particularly Aristotle, the first teacher, as he was called by them.

The earlier Arab scholastics, al-Kindi,¹ Ibn Sina and al-Farabi, with some significant modifications, generally followed the definition of time offered by Aristotle, as the quantity or measure of motion (*azzamanu adadulharkati*). They also agreed with Aristotle that time is primarily related to circular motion: it is the measure of circular motion with relation to priority and posteriority. Circular movement, for them, is the perfect one because it is not by force of nature but by choice or will that comes from the moving power of the soul. The cause of motion, and therefore, time, lies in the universal soul (*fannafsu 'illatu wujudizzamani*).² Aristotle had raised the question, what would be of time if there is no soul?³ Ibn Sina's answer is without soul, there would be no time. Ibn Sina makes it clear that for him time is real and objective, but its reality is of a lower order. He writes clearly, 'There are different levels of existence, the existence of some of them requires no proof and there are some which are very weak in their existence. The probability is that the existence of time is still weaker than that of movement'. As a true Aristotelian, Ibn Sina attacks the atomists who believed that time consists of indivisible atoms or monads. In the Aristotelian tradition, he believes that the temporal moment, like its counterpart the spatial point, has only an imaginary (*tawahhumi*) existence,

not a real one. Time is potentially divisible but not actually divisible. Moments (anat) are only imaginary limits of time, time like motion is continuous. Time cannot be conceived in immobility, it would then be of fixed duration, and would no longer be true time.

So far, Ibn Sina was following Aristotle with only certain modifications. But there is one point where Ibn Sina seems to be quite original, and that is in his theory of varieties of time. These varieties or different levels of time are: *Zaman* or time proper as the serial time, *Dahr* or duration, and *Sarmad* or eternity.⁴ This distinction corresponds to the levels of reality, i.e., movables or sensible, and the intelligible and their mutual relations. The relation of the sensible or movables with the movables is designated time proper or *Zaman*; the relation of the sensible with the intelligible is called *Dahr* or duration; and the relation of intelligible with the intelligible is described as *Sarmad* or eternity.⁵ The eternal duration encompasses all time. It is the middle term which connects the two orders of reality. On this point the influence of Plato is evident, as it was also a passion of these Arab philosophers to seek a reconciliation between the two masters. It is also probable that the Zoroastrian-Zurvanite influence was also operative. The Zurvanites had divided time into *Zaman-e-Akaranak* and *Zaman-Iderang-Khuvatai*,⁶ which comes very close to absolute time. The Islamic philosophers defined *Dahr* (duration) as the ‘basis of Time and its inner principle’⁷ (*batin al-Zaman*). It is defined as ‘the permanent moment in which the divine presence expands, it is the basis of time and holds in itself eternity’.⁸

For Ibn Sina as well as all Arab philosophers, God is above these orders or reality, whose knowledge encompasses all these levels, but as divine knowledge consists of universals, it is clear that divine fore-knowledge would be only general. It is a significant point; Arab philosophers, particularly Ibn Sina, al-Farabi and Ibn Rushd, would agree with modern logicians like Pierce that statements regarding the future could only be of a general nature. The dilemma of divine foreknowledge and human freedom was sought to be resolved by them by making the claims of theology subservient to the demands of metaphysics.

It is significant in this regard that Ibn Sina’s predecessor, al-Farabi—the second teacher—tried to maintain the true spirit of Aristotle in his

commentary on Aristotle's 'On Interpretation'. Aristotle had expressed his own doubts regarding the applicability of the 'law of the excluded middle' to statements regarding future events. According to him, the view that statements regarding the future would be either true or false leads to an impossible conclusion; for we see that both deliberation and action are causative with regard to future, and that, to speak more generally, in those things which are not continuously actual there is a potentiality in either direction. Such things may either be or not be; events also therefore may either take place or not take place. It is therefore plain that it is not of necessity that everything is or takes place; but in some instances there are real alternatives, in which case the affirmation is no more true and no more false than the denial; while some exhibit a pre-disposition and general tendency in one direction or the other, and yet can issue in the opposite direction by exception. It is therefore plain that it is not necessary that of an affirmation and a denial one should be true and the other false. For in the case of that which applies to that which exists potentially, but not actually, the rule which applies to that which exists actually does not hold good.⁹

This passage from Aristotle has aroused keen interest among logicians both belonging to antiquity and the contemporary logical scene. It is, however, clear that Aristotle seems to be inclined more towards a concept of future which is 'open', particularly so far as the human world, where deliberation and prior planning is possible, is concerned. Al-Farabi, commenting on this, writes,

All the kinds of necessity (are such that) one of the two contradictories is true in such cases determinately. But the kinds of matters of possibility (are such that) one of the two contradictories is true without determination. For in contradictories which are equally possible without any complete determination, the true and the false alternative are (determined by) whichever happens.¹⁰

In this interpretation of al-Farabi his metaphysical and theological motives are also clear: he wanted to maintain the freedom of man, a doctrine of the Qur'an, as interpreted by him in his other works, along with the freedom of God in his creative aspect. It is significant, as Rescher has pointed out, that the Arab scholastics including Ibn Rushd maintained this close

interpretation of Aristotle's passage, which was also continued by the medieval Christian masters.¹¹

It is clear from this brief discussion that time-tension, a significant psychological attitude of the people of Semitic religions, was acute in the minds of the Arab philosophers. It is also probable that, besides the Greek source, the Zoroastrian-Zurvanite influence was also operative in the early Islamic culture, as al-Farabi and Ibn Sina were both inheritors of Islamic, Greek and Iranian-Zoroastrian influences.

This time-tension and an acute time-consciousness is best represented in the thought of the Iranian philosopher of the seventeenth-century, Sadr ud-Din ash-Shirazi or Mulla Sadra, as he is commonly called, whose thought has not been given its full and deserved recognition, either by oriental writers or orientalist interested in the problem of time. Shirazi is interesting because he revived an interest in speculative metaphysics in medieval Islam which had received a shattering blow from the famous early medieval theologian, al-Ghazali.

The fundamental concept of Shirazi, which is the cornerstone of his thought is the dynamic nature of substance itself. The changeless immutable substance of the earlier tradition has been completely transformed by him. Motion is not a mere accident, it is rather the essence of substance. He considers the world of nature in constant motion, undergoing continuous change. Growth and development are its essential features. Things come into being in a gradual process and pass out of existence in a similar manner. The unity and identity of things is not something separate from this process of becoming; it is in this process that the identity reveals itself and has to be discovered. According to him, reality (*asl*) of a thing is its being (*wujud*) and essence is a hypothetical or relative term (*farzi* or *itabari*). The being itself is a process of change, not outside it. One significant point which he makes is that all types of movements are caused by the nature of the being (*taba*), which is the direct cause and source of movement. He notes: the being of a thing (*huwayyat*) must be changing and subject to movement, otherwise movement will not be possible. Shirazi follows the Aristotelian definition that time is motion in its quantitative or measurable aspect, but insists that time is not something external to movement. He states quite clearly that time conceived as priority and posteriority are mere

abstractions from reality which is always changing, becoming and renewing itself. It is on account of movement as change, an inherent feature of nature, that novelty appears in the world and reality unfolds itself in newer and newer forms. Combining the mystical illuminationist views, this Iranian philosopher reaches the conclusion that movement is an essential feature of the world of nature and there is nothing static in it. Rest and not change, immobility and not motion are illusions created by our sense-perception. The spiritual experience, he maintains, leads man to a world where everything is aspiring to become, and to be more perfect and to reach higher levels of being.

While maintaining that time has no beginning and no end, Shirazi tries to avoid the conclusion, fatal for a theist, that it is co-eternal with God. Divine life is ontologically prior to all happenings and yet, as it consists of a series of illuminations, it gives rise to a world where movement is ceaseless. There is substantial continuity between God and the universe, which means that for him there cannot be two orders of reality independent of each other. As divine attention has no end and his word no termination, it is not improper to describe the world as in a state of continuous creation and becoming. Shirazi was able to resolve the Augustinian dilemma of the world having a beginning and God implying no beginning or end. Time presents a dilemma for a theistic thinker only if the world-process is considered to be ontologically 'other' from divine reality, his word.

One more point which is significant in the thought of this last Aristotelian of Islam is his bold suggestion that material substance is neither simply space or simply time, it is space-time. The actual being is composed of spatial extension and temporal duration. He calls space and time mere abstractions from a mature creative.

¹ Editor's note: Al-Kindi (d. 870) is known as the first outstanding Islamic philosopher. He concerned himself not only with the philosophical questions treated by Aristotelian Neoplatonists of Alexandria, but also with such subjects as astrology, medicine, Indian arithmetic, the manufacture of swords and cooking. He is credited with about 270 works (mostly short treatises), of which a considerable number are extant, some only in Latin translations.

² Ibn Sina, cited in Sayyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Cosmological Doctrines* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), p. 226.

³ Aristotle, 'Physics', in David Ross, ed., *Works of Aristotle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964).
⁴ See, Fakhr ud-Din ar-Razi, *Al-Mabahis al-Mushriqiyya*, 2 vols (Hyderabad: Dairat al-Ma arif, n.d.), p. 645.

Editor's note: Fakhr ud-Din ar-Razi (Latin Rhazes, d. 1209), theologian and scholar. Though his aggressiveness created many enemies and involved him in numerous intrigues, his intellectual brilliance was universally accepted and attested by his *Mafatih al-ghayb* or *Kitab at-tafsir al-kabir* ('The Keys to the Unknown' or 'The Great Commentary'), *Muhassal afkar al-mutaqaddimin wa-al-muta'akhhirin* ('Collection of the Opinions of Ancients and Moderns') and *Al-Mabahis al-Mushriqiyya* ('Eastern Discourses'). The latter work attempts to reconcile Islamic theology and Greek philosophy. His other works are on such varied topics as medicine, astrology, geometry, physiognomy, minerology and grammar.

⁵ See, also, Thomas Aquinas' tract *De Instantibus* on this point.

⁶ See, R.C. Zaehner, *The Teachings of the Magi: A Compendium of Zoroastrian Beliefs* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1956).

⁷ The entry *Dahr* in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed., M. Th. Houtsmi, T.W. Arnold, R. Basset and R. Hartman, vol. 1, A—D (Leiden: E.J. Brill; London: Luzac and Co., 1913).

⁸ Sharif al-Jurjani, *Tarifat*, Abd al-Munim al-Hifini, ed. (Cairo, n.d.), p.117.

⁹ Aristotle, *Categories and De Interpretatione*, trans., and ed., J.L. Ackrill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), chapter 9, sections 18a, 19b.

¹⁰ Al-Farabi, 'Commentary on Aristotle's *Perihermenias* (De Interpretatione)', edited and introduced by Wilhelm Khutsh and Stanley Marrow (Beyrouth [Beirut]: Imprimerie Catholique, 1960), p. 97; this translation is from Nicholas Rescher, *Studies in the History of Arabic Logic* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1963) chapter 5, p. 196.

¹¹ Nicholas Rescher, 'On Truth and Necessity in Temporal Perspective' in H. Richard Gale, ed., *The Philosophy of Time* (New York: Doubleday, Anchor, 1967).

The Tension between Morality and Law in Islam

One of the presuppositions of this paper is the statement that the basic dogmas of a religion, or the fundamental tenets of a religion, do not necessarily lead to any particular set of moral commands or legal injunctions. In other words, one cannot deduce, in an a priori manner, the latter or their modifications in late history from given beliefs and dogmas and expect these deductions to correspond with actual commands, injunctions, or their later developments. The fact that the former involve a certain ethical vision does not alter the above statement, as this relation does not have the nature of a logical implication. An ethical vision might have an historical element whereas the actual legal injunction is necessarily a specific response to an actual temporal situation. The relation between ethical vision and the latter is more of a psychological nature which colours and influences the universe of human intentions and desires. However, there always remains a gap between the basic ethical vision and the actual commands and injunctions. Later, this gap reveals itself in the lifestyle of those who prefer to act according to the letter of the law and those who prefer to strive to get at the historical vision, the basic piety which might be common to more than one historical religion. A serious study of any religion, its dogmas and its legal structure, reveals this difference. The legal structure that evolves out of a certain religion does not only contain obligations, it also provides for a certain area of permissibility, and the gap between the two cannot be explained a priori. What actually brings the three—fundamental beliefs, moral commands and legal injunctions—together, in the case of at least two historical religions, Judaism and Islam, is their source, the verbal revelation, which means that the relation is not an internal one. It is obvious that the passage from one realm to the other might, at any moment, become uneasy. If revelation is considered an

instance of the disclosure of the divine intention, it is necessary to remember that the source is the realm of 'all-possibility' and it is not improbable that the different moments of the same revelation, which, while being in the strict sense logically compatible, may not be existentially compatible, i.e., on the level of human existence in different periods of human history. It is this fact which necessitates a continuous attempt at applying reason to the domain of revelation. A religious culture which does not grant to reason itself a revelatory status becomes a victim of stagnation. This probability of incompatibility increases in the case of revelations which do not become subject to abrogation, in the sense that people still believe in the validity and infallibility of revelation and positively strive to approximate their conduct to the letter and intent of revelation. The problem has become more complex in the case of Islam as the notion of infallibility has been extended in its application, from the actual revelation, to the deeds and spoken words of the historical person, the medium of revelation (*sunna* and *hadith*), and third, to the historic community (*umma*), the bearer of tradition, and to the infallibility of consensus (*ijma*) or, in the case of the Shi'ite tradition, to the infallibility of the *imam*. It is quite possible that the guiding passion behind this principle of extension was the quest for certitude in the age of uncertainty when the community was forced to grapple with unforeseen situations. It is also probable that the community having once been guided by God through revelation and been founded by his last prophet, the consummation of prophecy itself wanted to be eternally free from the feeling of guilt of deviation from the right path. The point need not be further elaborated that the principle of time, which involves change and uncertainty about future, always proves a stumbling block to revelation, the source of which is believed to be eternity, and once eternity is revealed, it cannot transcend time.

In the case of Islam, the relationship between religion, morality, and law was more complex also because Allah, the originator and the initiator of history, which is his sign (*ayat*) and through which his intention is disclosed, chose one more agent, which by its nature is more subject to change—State, as one of the instruments or vehicles of revelation. The State founded by the Prophet of Islam had its origin in revelation, in the sense that it coincided with revelation and was not the product of desire or *hava*. The Prophet did not use an already existing institution for the purpose

of creating the desired community, (*ummataṇwasatan* or the *khayra ummatin*), but created a State so that *din* is completed also in its organizational or outward form. The legislative verses (*tashrī`i*) of the Qur'an were not merely meant to be the guiding principles for believers in their moral life, they had a specific legislative purpose also. They were meant to be enforced by the coercive authority of the newly founded State, the head of which was the Prophet himself. It is not incidental that most of the legislative verses were not addressed to a future contingency but were responses to some specific questions. They had a situational origin, which is an important attribute of legislation. In legislation the present problem is more important than future possibilities, which means it is a secular activity, from which it follows that theocracy is an impossible passion. The Prophet had to act, he waited for guidance, and God obliged him and his community. The legislator legislates, he does not lay down moral principles and ethical precepts. Even when he is guided by his ethical vision, he is more interested in the approximation of the actual to the ideal and never sacrifices the actual for the ideal. In such a case the tension between the ideal good and law, and between eternity and time, is resolved in the interests of the latter principles, which means that the secular dominates the eternal. The founding of the State by the Prophet was not meant to bring down the already existing religious institutions—as was done by Ashoka and Constantine vis-à-vis Buddhism and Christianity—but it was a case of creating religious institutions with the power of the newly formed State. The fact that the history of the religious institutions in Islam coincides with the founding of the State, gives to the relationship of the three principles a peculiar and unique character. More important than the statement that early law was revealed is the fact that the contemporary followers of the Prophet believed that the legislative verses of the Qur'an emanated from God, although it was also known to them that they had more of a reformative thrust directed against existing customs. It was a case of the contingent getting a status of the eternal. Similarly, the authority of the Prophet in his actual political and administrative power had its source in his prophetic personality, which according to the Qur'an—'Nor does he say of his own desire. It is not but a revelation revealed taught him by one might in power'—means that obedience had to be unconditional. Later, the community derived its self-view from the fact that it was founded by the

Prophet, hence the doctrine of the infallibility of the final *umma*. Whatever might be the status of the *hadith*—‘My community will not agree on an error (or misguidance)’—it certainly became the guiding principle of the historic community, and very soon became the motive force of the ‘ideology’ of Islam to which the trans-historical vision itself was made subservient. This multiplication of the principle of infallibility gave stability to the ideological structure of Islam, but this stability was achieved at the cost of creativity. Moreover, the exaltation of the category of State resulted in the priority of the legal category over the moral and the religious, which still continues to be the mental framework of ‘believers’, although the State as *Khilafat* had long ago disappeared in the mist of history. This close relation between legality and morality has often been interpreted as the unity of the secular and the religious in Islam, but the problem is that a unity of such divergent principles, which involves a unity of two different dimensions of time, can never attain a satisfactory equilibrium. As life demands continuous resolution of tensions, it has to be done in favour of one principle, and the history of Islam indicates that general consensus had always been in favour of the category of law. The Sufi who tried to bring morality and law under the principle of piety (*zuhd*) remained in a minority, and he did do so only by withdrawing from the world and its demands. In the lifestyle of the community, i.e., in its ethos, religiosity and morality became synonymous with legality. In their secular life men seek the permissible and try to be as near as possible to that which is not forbidden (*ibaha*), and do not normally strive for the higher stage of virtue (*al-birr*). To take an instance for illustration, the Qur’an while permitting polygamy notes:

If ye fear that ye shall not
Be able to deal justly
With the Orphans.
Marry women of your choice;
Two, or three, or four:
But if ye fear that ye shall not
Be able to deal justly (with them)
Then only one, or (a captive)¹
That your right hand possesses

That will be more suitable,
To prevent you
From doing injustice (iv, 3).

Apart from the fact that a modernist translator, Abdullah Yusuf Ali, qualifies the translation of *was ma malakat aimanukum* as 'a captive' in the singular, which is not according to the consensus, as it had always meant any number of captive women, the notable point is that the moral category of justice (*`adl*) never guides the conscience of the community so far as this category morally implies. What has been guiding, and still guides, their conscience is the fact of the permissibility of polygamy. It is clear that the moral category can never be fully translated into legislation and consequently becomes a subject of monotonous interpretation. It is also to be noted that, so far as the legal form of the verse is concerned, the principle of justice does not apply to the captives or 'slave girls', as it appears to be meant as an alternative to the possibility of injustice. The legal security granted to the children of the captives from their masters becomes inconsequential by the possibility of arbitrary and unequal treatment. Legislation could not meet the demands of the ethical vision of equality of all humanity on the level of vision. There is a temporal limit for history to rise to the higher level of eternity. One more point in this connection is to be noted; with the abolition of slavery in most of the modernizing Islamic states no believer insists on enjoying the right granted to him by the sacred legislation. Even if the door of *ijtihad* is opened, it is doubtful if the community will grant its consensus to any proposed legislation which intends to curtail the right to polygamy unless the state is able to get the consensus of the *`ulama* by either persuasion or by using its coercive authority, which has traditionally been the case in the history of Islamic communities. It is not improbable that in the latter case this type of *ijtihad* might be considered as an evil innovation (*bidah saiyyiah*), as it appears to contradict the Qur'an, *sunna*, and the earlier *ijma`*. But as *ijma`* has also decided that order is better than anarchy, the majority (*jumhur*) might prefer obedience to open revolt,² if they are properly tutored in the light of the 'doctrine of pretence' (*bab al-Hiyal*). It can be mentioned in this connection that the principle of *sunna*, so far as *jumhur* is concerned, does not normally include the element of the moral fervour of the Prophet and

his strong passion for the liberation of man translated into action so far as concrete situations of life could permit.

The source of the precedence of the notion of law over morality lies in the ideological structure of Islam, which was never solely determined by revelation as it has been pointed out earlier. Each ideology has its own distinct anthropology, and in the ideological structure of Islam man was considered a being whose goals have been eternally determined, the highest goal being submission to the will of God, not as perceived by his own insight freely interpreting the revelation, but, as perceived for him by ideology. It was, perhaps, on this account that Aristotelian ethics of predetermined goals, as the essences for the realization or actualization of which the individuals belonging to a species strive, became the philosophic ingredient of this ideology, and also of medieval Christianity, with this difference that for Aristotle the essence was identified with nature and in this ideology nature itself was predetermined by God. In political thought, the Platonic ideal of the perfect State ruled by the perfect law-giver became the model for the classical Islamic philosopher. *Al-Madinat al-Fazila* is the ideal State ruled by the *imam* or the ideal law-giver, while man lives in *al-Madinat al-Fasiqa*, nostalgically looking backward into the past for the lost utopia. A *hadith*, such as ‘the best epoch is my epoch and then the succeeding one’ satisfied this nostalgic spirit. Faith looks into the past or the ideal *sunna* and the consensus of the early ‘companions’, and the normal thinker looks for the realization of the ideals set by the prophetic reason. It then follows that actual human society is viewed as a sick, or potentially sick organism, and the ruler as the physician of the soul.³

This ideology served the purpose of stability during the successive periods of ‘disordered changes’ (*fitan*), but the question is, can it serve any longer in the epoch of ordered technological and social change? It is clear that this inevitable conflict between an outmoded ideology and ordered change will result in an ultimate setback, and possibly even total defeat, for the former. But it is also not improbable that this consequence entails a total severance of the secular from the eternal, particularly in the case of a religious culture which has maintained an uneasy relation for such a long time in history. Scientific and technological changes need a concept of man and his goals which is different from what a theological culture needs. One

of the elements of this new anthropology is the idea of self-fulfilment on this earth, and man's activity has to be directed towards creating the means for this ideal. This idea is not necessarily opposed to the belief in a life hereafter, probably an essential element of religious life; it only refuses to transfer all hopes of happiness entirely to the other world. It views the hereafter rather as a higher stage of self-fulfilment, poetically imagined by the twentieth-century poet-philosopher of the Islamic world, Iqbal.⁴ The actual life situation of most of the Islamic world has made the ideological superstructure of Islam already irrelevant, not because it has ceased to believe in God and his guidance, but because it has made it necessary to perceive his guidance through such factors as have no relevance to the needs of the changed situation.

There is a school of thought among Muslims which believes that a scientific and technological revolution does not need a basic change in ideology and tries to interpret the changes in the western world as the results of a defective Christianity. What this school forgets is the fact that the differences between medieval Christianity and premodern Islam were not so much ideological as institutional. If the infallibility of the Church was the articulated doctrine of medieval Christianity, the near-infallibility of the *`ulama*, the doctrine of the inviolability of *ijma`*, is an implicit assumption of the theological culture of Islam. A pertinent question is: does this doctrine need a reinterpretation as, for instance, Iqbal suggests, for meeting the changed demands of life, or is it to be completely ignored as an inessential element of Islam as a religion? Even if the institutional arrangement suggested by Iqbal is considered workable in certain societies in the world of Islam, it is not possible to try it in plural societies, where more than 100 million Muslims live. The problem does not appear serious at the moment, but as the number of Muslim men and women seeking self-fulfilment under the impact of technological changes will increase, which is not a matter of a distant future, the entire fabric of Islamic ideology will be shaken. Law as developed in Islam and moral doctrines as presented in the medieval Islamic literature are, in most of the cases, opposed to this new urge of man, but the essential revelation is not opposed to it: Is not the following an authentic image of a Muslim?

‘His mission in life was to know the truth and to proclaim it, to practise

virtue and to propagate it, to appreciate beauty and to create it, to be just and to uphold justice. He has been commanded to acquire knowledge, power and wealth but with the condition that he should keep knowledge subservient to truth and virtue, power to justice and love, and spend wealth for the sake of God, that is, in the service of God's creatures'.⁵

¹ Even a modern *mufasssir*, Abul Kalam Azad, does not qualify it with the singular; see, 'Sura Nisa' in his *Tarjuman ul-Quran*, 2 vols, translated by Syed Abdul Latif (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1962–67).

² The Sufis are, perhaps, an exception. But, unfortunately for the moral zealots and fortunately for the average world-oriented believer, the consensus of the Sufis did not become a source of guidance. It neither enjoyed a legal sanction nor became a moral force.

³ See, for instance, Jalal ud-Din Dawani, *Akhlaq-i-Jalali* (Lucknow: Naval Kishore Press, 1909), p. 26.

Editor's note: Jalal ud-Din Dawani (1427-1502/1503), jurist and philosopher, is regarded as chiefly responsible for maintaining an Islamic philosophical tradition in the fifteenth century. While a major part of his 70-odd philosophical works are commentaries on the philosophy of Suhrawardi, the rest deal with ethics and moral philosophy. His *Akhlaq-i-Jalali* ('The Practical Philosophy of the Muhammadan People') is an account of what a just ruler should or should not do.

⁴ Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934; Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 1994), p.171.

⁵ Abid Hussain, *Destiny of Indian Muslims* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1965), p. 261.

3



Iqbal on Human Knowledge

Iqbal is essentially a religious philosopher. His concept of time as duration, his main achievement as a thinker, is closely linked with his philosophy of religion which is, in turn, based on a theory of knowledge. Iqbal's chief passion in *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*¹ is to make religion possible in a well-defined scheme of existence, and to try to bridge the gulf between the religious and non-religious dimensions of experience and the temporal and non-temporal orders of reality in traditional religious thought. While it is true, as Nicholson suggests, that when Iqbal speaks of religion he means Islam, it is equally true that when he speaks of Islam he also means religion as such. He is not unaware of the fact that the philosophy of religion is mainly concerned with religious attitudes as such, but at the same time, it is also not untrue that so far no philosopher of religion has succeeded in completely dissociating himself from one particular religion. While considering the phenomenon, Iqbal is more explicit in this matter, and therefore he has set before himself the task of reconstructing Islamic thought on the basis of a theory of knowledge and a concept of nature of universal validity. It is very clear that his attempt to reconstruct Islamic thought succeeds or fails only on the basis of his theory of knowledge. The very title of his lectures 'The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam', suggests that the author cannot start with a complete depreciation of conceptual thought as a source of knowledge. One simply cannot reconstruct a thought whether religious or aesthetic, without giving to conceptual thought a proper place in the scheme of knowledge. There is an interesting point to note here, which is very important for a serious study of Iqbal as a poet-philosopher for whom poetry was the chief medium of expression. In his poetry we find a tension between the principle of intellect or conceptual thinking and intuition or immediate awareness of

reality and more often the balance is tilted in favour of the latter. This over-emphasis on intuition, which is identified with love in his poetry and which has been counterpoised against intellect, reaches such limits that the poet Iqbal can be easily characterized as an intense anti-intellectual, giving expression to ideas which remind us of some modern extreme anti-intellectuals. This will not be a very fair estimate of Iqbal as a serious philosophical thinker. There is a constant tension between the poet and the philosopher even in Iqbal's poetry, and it is true that this tension is often resolved in favour of the poet.² Most of the poetry in the East had been sceptical of the claims of reason and was completely in favour of love which is, for these poets, something more spiritual than the Greek *eros*, less unsensuous than the Christian *agape*, and definitely more emotional than the Buddhist *amitta*. All these terms are non-intellectual, and in them we have even an element of surrender of the principle of intellect. Moreover, there is something in the poetic instant which is against or which even shows antipathy to the discursive piecemeal reasoning of intellect. The poetic instant has a religious moment in it and the religious moment has a poetic instant indissolubly connected with it. It is in the process of communication that the poetic instant and the religious moment are expanded into 'communicative time' which is measurable in stanzas, verses and is described in parts. It is on account of this regressive mode that the poetic and religious experiences and visions encounter a fall or descent. Philosophical method starts with piecemeal realities and reconstructs a 'total view', painfully, laboriously and gradually. In the former case the total vision is fragmented into pieces with a 'sad consciousness' that the result is not adequate to the starting point, and hence a pathos accompanies the joy of expression. In philosophy, there is an onward march from the multiplicity of facts to a total vision, from the unhappy company of facts to the happy intellectual communion of 'one'; in poetry, there is a transition from the contemplative solitude of the 'one' to the 'unhappy' social communion of the many. It is on this account that poetry is not a safe guide to really understand and comprehend the poet's intellectual viewpoint, as it is more an escape from the intellect than an expression of it. For an understanding of the intellectual content of the poetry of a poet-philosopher we have to turn to other sources, such as his prose writing or

conversations.³ What can be refuted or approved is the intellectual content of poetry and not the poetry itself.

Iqbal's lectures elaborate the intellectual content of his poetry and its latent aspiration, besides giving us a new world-outlook in the history of Muslim culture. In his poetry, Iqbal gives an impression that the way of intellect and the way of experience are two distinctly separate modes of apprehending reality. Further, it seems as if this dualism is finally irreconcilable. In his serious philosophical exposition, he is not so emphatic on this dualism. On the contrary, he explains that they are simply two levels of total consciousness, lying very close to each other. The philosophical ideal of Iqbal is not to emphasize the gap between them but to find a way of bringing a reconciliation between them, without sacrificing the uniqueness of each. He draws an inference from the phenomenology of religious experience and states: 'The evidence of religious experts in all ages and countries is that there are potential types of consciousness lying close to our normal consciousness'.⁴ One level of our consciousness, which is our normal consciousness, deals with the world as facts and the other, lying close to it, deals with values and ideals, pertaining to the unplumbed depths of man's being.⁵ Strictly speaking, these two levels do not deal with two different worlds but approach the same world with two, but not irreconcilable, angles. They are not two different worlds, but rather two different perspectives. Their value systems differ; one looks at facts as the source of values and the other looks at them as expressions of deeper values, but in reality facts and values interpenetrate each other. In Iqbal's words: 'It is the mysterious touch of the ideal that animates and sustains the real, and through it alone we can discover and affirm the ideal'.⁶ The ultimate union of the real, as perceived through our sense-experience and systematized by our intellect, and the ideal known through vision or intuition, is one of the central ideas of Iqbal.⁷ The entire revaluation of man, one of the chief contributions of Iqbal, is done through this union of the ideal and the real because it is at this point that different levels of existence meet. The significance of human endeavour lies in bringing these different levels to a concrete unity.

Iqbal does not find a necessary divide between scientific and religious processes, so much emphasized even in recent Indian thought. For him the

‘truth is that the religious and scientific processes though involving different methods are identical in their final aim. Both aim at reaching the most real’.⁸ He makes a very significant point in this argument, that the way to pure objectivity lies through what may be called the purification of experience. In this regard he makes a distinction between experience as a natural fact and experience as indicative of the inner nature of reality. Experience as a natural fact is explained in the context of the causal scheme, and experience as indicative of inner nature belongs to the domain of religion where the attempt is to discover inner meaning. But both these processes are really descriptions of the same world with this difference, that in the scientific process the ego’s standpoint is necessarily exclusive, whereas in the religious process the ego integrates its competing tendencies and develops a single inclusive attitude resulting in a kind of synthetic transfiguration of experience. Both are, in this sense, complementary rather than opposites, as both of them are directed towards the purification of experience in their respective fields. This purification of experience entails the elimination of all subjective elements in the content of experience with a view to finally reach what is absolutely objective. The aim of religious philosophy, in this scheme, is to reflect on the data of religious experience with conceptual tools; in this reflective enquiry one does not accept every experience or all the elements of the same experience as they are expressed but has to critically examine whatever is experienced. Religion for Iqbal supremely needs a rational foundation for its ultimate principles. The reason for this search for a rational foundation is obvious.

Since the transformation and guidance of man’s inner and outer life is the essential aim of religion, it is obvious that the general truths which it embodies must not remain unsettled. No one would hazard action on the basis of doubtful principles of conduct. Indeed, in view of its functions, religion stands in greater need of a rational foundation of its ultimate principles than even the dogmas of science.⁹

Iqbal examines the critical approach of a great theologian of Islam in the medieval age, al-Ghazali, and makes a very significant observation. Like Kant, al-Ghazali examined the limitations of reason and while Kant, consistent with his principles, could not affirm the possibility of a

knowledge of God, al-Ghazali went a step further and tried to find an independent basis of experience, by which religion could exist independently of science and metaphysics. In this bold attempt, according to Iqbal, lies al-Ghazali's greatest weakness.

Al-Ghazali finding no hope in analytical thought, moved to mystic experience and there found an independent content for religion. ... But the revelation of the total Infinite in mystic experience convinced him of the finitude and inconclusiveness of thought and drove him to draw a line of cleavage between thought and intuition. He failed to see that thought and intuition are organically related and that thought must necessarily stimulate finitude and inconclusiveness because of its alliance with serial time.^{[10](#)}

So far he seems to agree with Bergson that intellect is tied up with spatialized time and hence is incapable of reaching reality. But he does not agree with Bergson that there is no level of conceptual thought which is accessible to reality. He does not share Bergson's view that intellect is a mere aid in the life of action and that the higher realms of life are completely inaccessible to the intellect. Iqbal does not agree with the proposition that as thought is essentially finite, it is unable to capture the infinite. He thinks that this conclusion of al-Ghazali is based on a mistaken notion of the movement of thought in knowledge. What has been said about thought in general is valid only for a certain level of thought, where thought deals in the casual realm. Iqbal notes: 'In its deeper movement, however, thought is capable of reaching an immanent Infinite in whose self-unfolding movement the various finite concepts are mere moments'.^{[11](#)} It means that there is also an intellectual mode of apprehending reality and, therefore, 'thought in its essential nature is not static; it is dynamic and unfolds its internal infinitude in time'. The failure of Kant and al-Ghazali lies in not seeing that 'thought, in the very act of knowledge, passes beyond its own finitude'.^{[12](#)} There is one important difference between the finitudes of nature and the finitudes of thought. The finitudes of nature, Iqbal says, are mutually exclusive and the finitudes of thought, on the other hand, are incapable of limitation. Iqbal writes: 'It is a mistake to regard thought as inconclusive, for it too, in its own way is a greeting of the finite with the

infinite'.¹³ This sounds rather Hegelian. Iqbal, like his contemporary John Dewey, believes that thought, called inquiry by John Dewey, results in unified wholes and the Hegelian conclusion is inescapable if one does not agree with Kant that there is a limit to theoretical understanding. In spite of this clear Hegelian element, Iqbal comes very close to the empirical spirit, particularly of Dewey's type, as he too gives to sense-experience an equal share in the scheme of knowledge. Iqbal's theory of knowledge is also influenced by his special type of humanism. Iqbal shares Dewey's view that knowledge is basically functional.

It is the lot of man to share in the deeper aspirations of the universe around him and to shape his destiny as well as that of the universe, now by adjusting himself to its forces, now by putting the whole of his energy to mould its forces to his own ends and purposes. ... But his life and the onward march of his spirit depend on the establishment of connexions with the reality that confronts him. It is knowledge that establishes these connexions, and knowledge is sense-perception elaborated by understanding.¹⁴

It is very clear that such a theory of knowledge is based on a philosophy of organism: the universe consists of organisms of various orders and the most important function for these organisms is first their mutual adjustment and second their adjustment with the environment. It is in this process of adjustment that knowledge is born. The instrumentalist bias becomes clear when Iqbal writes: 'Thus the character of man's knowledge is conceptual, and it is with the weapons of this conceptual knowledge that man approaches the observable aspects of Reality'.¹⁵ There is, of course, a higher purpose behind the intellectual effort which man exerts in his conceptual thinking. The intellectual effort not only sharpens our insight, it also 'prepares us for a more masterful insertion into subtler aspects of human experience. It is our reflective contact with the temporal flux of things which trains us for an intellectual vision of the non-temporal'.¹⁶ Thus, the intellectual effort fulfils two purposes: first, it helps us adjust ourselves with the environment and attain mastery over it and, second, it prepares us for an extra-intellectual vision of reality. The way of the

intellect is to be supplemented by the way of the heart or intuition. What distinguishes Iqbal from other Sufi thinkers is his insistence that both the ways are essential for human fulfilment. A certain inadequacy of the intellectual way is not to be confused as its superficiality. Al-Ghazali, in his scheme of knowledge, left some place for conceptual thought but denied that it can reveal any feature of reality. His ‘occasionalistic’ solution of the riddle of existence left nothing for man to explore. In Iqbal’s scheme, intellect and vision or intuition become complementary. The intellectual way prepares man for a higher vision but does not offer certitude. For certitude, the way of the heart is needed.¹⁷ Iqbal quotes the Qur’an to prove that the heart has its own claims to be a source of knowledge:

God hath made everything which he created most good; and began the creation of man with clay; then ordained his progeny from germs of life, from sorry water; then shaped him, and breathed of His spirit unto him, and gave you hearing and seeing and *heart*: what little thanks do ye return? (xxxii, 6–8)¹⁸

The heart, according to Iqbal, is a kind of inner intuition or insight in which sensation, in the physiological sense of the word, does not play any part, yet it is not justifiable to call it merely supernatural, mystic or psychic. ‘The total-Reality, which enters our awareness and appears on interpretation as an empirical fact, has other ways of invading our consciousness and offers further opportunities of interpretation’, and our intuitive level is as normal as the sensory level and ‘facts of religious experience are facts among other facts of human experience and, in the capacity of yielding knowledge by interpretation, one fact is as good as another’.¹⁹ Facts of religious experience to become knowledge, need interpretation, as do other facts of experience. That is, they also need critical examination. Iqbal’s notion of intuition appears to be similar to that of Bergson,²⁰ but there are certain important differences which cannot be ignored.

For Bergson, intellect is not a truth-knowing faculty at all. It is practical in its essence and only enables us to act efficiently in the constant flux of things. For him the essential function of intelligence is to see the way out of a difficult situation and to find what is most suitable, or ‘what answers best

the question asked'. Intellect is counterpoised with instinct in Bergson's thought and what is called intuition comes very near to biological instinct rather than the 'intuition' of the Sufi. The difference between man and an ant—Bergson refers to them, respectively, as the lord of the soil and the lord of the sub-soil,²¹ is more fundamental for Bergson than the difference between a prophetic vision of reality and an ordinary man's awareness of it. Moreover, the dualism between intellect and will and intellect and intuition is fundamental and irreconcilable for Bergson. For Iqbal, on the other hand, they are not irreconcilable; the difference between them is not of kind, but only of degree. Bergson's dualism between matter and life is the ground on which the dualism between intellect and intuition is based. Iqbal sees no such ultimate distinction. Iqbal writes, in very clear terms, about this dualism:

[T]he vitalism of Bergson ends in an insurmountable dualism of will and thought. This is really due to the partial view of intelligence that he takes. Intelligence, according to him, is a spatializing activity; it is shaped on matter alone, and has only mechanical categories at its disposal. But ... thought has a deeper movement also. While it appears to break up Reality into static fragments, its real function is to synthesize the elements of experience by employing categories suitable to the various levels which experience presents. It is as much organic as life. The movement of life, as an organic growth, involves a progressive synthesis of its various stages. Without this synthesis it will cease to be organic growth. It is determined by ends, and the presence of ends means that it is permeated by intelligence. ... In conscious experience life and thought permeate each other. They form a unity. Thought, therefore, in its true nature, is identical with life.²²

Intuition, in Iqbal's opinion, comes very close to love rather than blind instinct. In love all the faculties of human psyche become intense and love becomes a bridge between the human and the divine. Iqbal's concept of intuition has its roots in the Sufi concept of love. Iqbal himself uses the words 'love' and 'vision' in contrast to 'intellect'.²³ The difference between intellect and love or intuition consists in the degree of certitude which they involve. The religious or non-rational intuitive experience is as immediate

as any other experience, but, first, it differs in so far as the object of experience is concerned. The object of religious experience is God and in this experience, Iqbal believes, we know God as we know any other object in other immediate experiences. Second, the mystic experience is an unanalyzable whole, though for Iqbal, this wholeness of the mystic experience does not mean 'discontinuance with the normal consciousness, as William James erroneously thought'.²⁴ In normal as well as mystic experience, it is the same reality which is operating on us. The only difference is that the mystic experience brings us into contact with the total passage of reality in which diverse stimuli merge into one another and form a single unanalyzable unity. Third, the mystic state is a moment of intense association with a transcendental, unique self. Thought in its deeper movement, we are told, while rising above its finitude, gives us an immanent view of reality, whereas the mystic state brings us closer to a unique self. For Iqbal, the immanent and the transcendental vision are not mutually exclusive, they are two modes, or rather two stages, of apprehending reality. Again, this mystic state, which brings us into an intimate association with the unique self, has some kind of resemblance to our normal experience, the nearest example of which is our immediate knowledge of other minds in our social experience.²⁵ Fourth, the mystic experience, while it is essentially incommunicable, is not devoid of cognitive content. On the contrary, it is on account of its cognitive content that it lends itself to the form of idea and becomes interpretable. The so-called communication of the mystic state in the form of a proposition is an interpretation which the mystic or the prophet gives to the content of his religious consciousness.²⁶ The feeling and the idea are the non-temporal and temporal aspects of the same unit of inner experience.

Inarticulate feeling seeks to fulfil its destiny in idea which, in its turn, tends to develop out of itself its own visible garment. It is no mere metaphor to say that idea and word both simultaneously emerge out of the womb of feeling, though logical understanding cannot but take them in their temporal order and thus create its own difficulty by regarding them as mutually isolated. There is a sense in which the word is also revealed.²⁷

Fifth, the mystic's intimate association with the eternal is not a complete break with serial time, although it gives him a sense of unreality. Both the mystic and the prophet return to the normal levels of consciousness, though the association with the eternal leaves a 'deep sense of authority after it has passed away'.²⁸ This kind of experience is not an entirely timeless experience. It is akin to what Eliot calls 'the point of the intersection of the timeless with time'. Iqbal is opposed to the notion that the human self can be completely absorbed in the divine self, obliterating all marks of individuality. For there is a return after the association, and the return is as genuine as was the association, and in the highest moment of association time does not lose its relevance, though it assumes a different sense. Moreover, the experience is not of identity, but of proximity.

The above mentioned characteristics of the mystic state show that it does not involve a complete break with the normal level of human experience. It is neither an abnormal state as some psychologists would like us to believe, nor is it a supra-normal or supernatural state as some of the 'occultists' would like to imagine; it is just a continuation of the normal level in which new data are offered which we do not receive in ordinary sense-experience. Religious experience too needs criteria by which its truth, or more appropriately its authenticity, can be tested. In this regard Iqbal makes his position clear:

Religious experience, I have tried to maintain, is essentially a state of feeling with a cognitive aspect, the content of which can not be communicated to others, except in the form of a judgment. Now when a judgment which claims to be the interpretation of a certain region of human experience, not accessible to me, is placed before me for my assent, I am entitled to ask what is the guarantee of its truth?²⁹

The tests which Iqbal offers are not different from those applicable to other forms of human experience. He is, however, not in favour of a correspondence test or coherence test. The reason is obvious. In such an experience we are not dealing with facts in the ordinary sense and hence a correspondence test would not be relevant. Iqbal's non-idealistic position rules out the possibility of the coherence test. He offers other tests, which he labels as intellectual and pragmatic tests. By the former he means critical

interpretation without any presuppositions of human experience, generally with a view to discover whether our interpretation leads us ultimately to a reality of the same character as is revealed by religious experience. The pragmatic test judges the experience by its fruits. Whereas the intellectual test is applied by the philosopher, the latter is applied by the prophet.

It is in the application of these tests that some larger problems of philosophy arise in his lectures, one of them being the problem of time and its relation to the religious experience. Iqbal, following Whitehead, does not believe in the 'bifurcation of nature' into matter and mind, primary and secondary qualities. The principle of the unity of nature and the human world leads him to discuss the relation of time to religious experience. Religious experience for him, is 'unitive' in character, i.e., it reveals the latent unity which is of course different from the 'identity' of existence. The characterization of the religious experience as entirely 'timeless' has created certain philosophical difficulties; one of them is epistemological, that is, how can the timeless be related to a knower who is in 'time'? Iqbal in his enquiry is led to believe that time is in some sense related to the higher religious experience, and as time is an integral element of experience, it must be in some sense an attribute of the reality which is revealed to us in a higher religious experience. Time, then, must be given a different significance and reality must be viewed in a perspective different from the traditional one so far adopted by the mystics. Traditional mysticism—in its overwhelming emotion of 'joy' in the being of God—has tended to think of reality as a 'real' completely separated from the ordinary 'real' accessible to human knowledge. The result of this dissociation has been the unreality of the world and of time. The proposition that the world is unreal is not an account of experience as such, but an interpretation of essentially incommunicable experience. Hence, the possibility of a different interpretation which preserves the continuity of reality. Religious experience being higher in its comprehensiveness must either absorb the lower experience, i.e., the normal one, or it must integrate the lower one with it and raise it to a higher level. The former course, besides creating some insurmountable difficulties of philosophical nature, saps all the energies of man for action, and the world, instead of presenting itself as a challenge or a stage for the fulfillment of human destiny, appears as insignificant. Therein lies the need for the pragmatic test.

It is clear that certain assumptions—all philosophies have certain unproven premises—determine the nature of Iqbal's enquiry. The propositions that the world consists of egos of different orders which develop themselves in time, and that God himself is an unique ego are the ultimate premise of Iqbal's thought. The only proof which he offers for the ultimacy of human ego is immediate experience—in the final analysis, immediate experience is the ultimate factor for him—which carries certitude for him.

The ultimate premises of Iqbal's philosophical outlook can be summed up in the following statements:

1. That the world consists of egos which are exclusive and independent of each other in an ontological sense. (These are somewhat similar to the Leibnizean monads.)
2. That the act of knowledge results in a relation between two or more egos; that one of them is a subject and the other(s) object(s); and that the distinction between subject and object(s) is real.
3. That the world of nature is real and consists of individualities, but there is an identity of essence. (Again a Leibnizean proposition.)
4. That there are different grades of subjectivities and objectivities. God is the highest subject, but is an object in the religious experience. It is in knowledge that, however, a relation is formed between two subjects of different orders of subjectivity. Egohood subsists epistemologically; the S/O relation is ultimate, although ontologically relative.
5. That the egos of different orders, as egos, possess different levels of freedom and that their freedom consists in trying to be what they essentially are, i.e., becoming egos of a higher order. It is what Iqbal calls, in the language of Islamic tradition, creating in them the attributes of God. It means that reality is dynamic in nature.
6. That the egos being essentially free are not governed entirely by causality, as causality operates at only one level of reality. The beings partake in, what is called in Islamic tradition, 'the world of command' (*al-'Alam al-Amr*). As causality does not touch the inner being of egos, serial time, a product of causality, belongs to their outward being, which lies on the surface of their being. There is an order of

time, duration, which is higher than serial time. It is necessary because there cannot be a complete breach between different levels of reality. Timelessness or eternity is another name for 'duration'. It is enjoyed by God in its purity, and is also enjoyable by man in his highest experience.

7. That serial time is not unreal; it has an epistemological value as it is related with the world of objects in the normal level. This means that science is not unreal or the scientific knowledge spurious. It is relevant to the order of beings as objects. Serial time is relational in its nature and to be relational is not to be unreal, because the terms of the relation are real.

¹ Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934; Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 1994).

² In one of his later poems, 'Reason and Love' in *Zarb-e Kaleem* (1938), this antipathy towards reason reaches its limit. The poet seems to be rather bitter towards reason and sounds enthusiastic about abandoning the principle of reason altogether. The poetic mood in some of the poems of this collection is that of complete indifference to the world. Iqbal might be passing through that condition in which one feels a strong tendency to 'drown' or 'burn' all that is obstructive in the 'final experience'. There is a saying among Muslim mystics that love is a fire which burns all that is other than God.

³ Goethe's conversations with Eckermann give us a valuable insight into the intellectual content of Goethe's literature.

⁴ *Reconstruction*, p. 175.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁷ Iqbal is perhaps the first poet in Indo-Muslim tradition who created poems of exquisite beauty on the theme of joy in nature, a theme completely forgotten in medieval and post-medieval poetry. In a poem in *Bal-e Jibril* ('Gabriel's Wing'; 1935), the soul of earth welcomes man on his arrival on earth. The style is so superb that its communication in any other language is not possible. It is significant that for Iqbal the coming of man on earth is not a fall; it is rather an occasion to rise higher.

⁸ *Reconstruction*, p. 185.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 5–6.

[11](#) Ibid., p. 6.

[12](#) Ibid.

[13](#) Ibid., p. 4.

[14](#) Ibid., pp. 11–12.

[15](#) Ibid., p. 12.

[16](#) Ibid., p. 14.

[17](#) The ‘way of the heart’ is a common phrase among Islamic mystics. For example, al-Ghazali has written on the properties of the heart as a source of knowledge in his *Ihya` ’ulum ad-Din*, ‘The Reviver of Religious Sciences’, (Bulaq, 1298 H or 1872–73).

[18](#) Cited in *Reconstruction*, p. 15; emphasis by Iqbal.

[19](#) Ibid.

[20](#) See, particularly, Henri Bergson’s notions of intelligence and instinct in *Creative Evolution*, trans., Arthur Mitchell (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1944).

[21](#) Ibid., p. 148.

[22](#) *Reconstruction*, pp. 49–50.

[23](#) In *Zarb-e Kaleem* (‘The Blow of Moses’; 1937), Iqbal writes: ‘Knowledge is the open question. Love is the hidden answer’. Knowledge stands at the stage of attributes, love is the direct vision of God. Knowledge is the product of the Book, love is the mother of the Book. In *Payam-e Mashriq* (‘Message of the East’; 1923), he praises the intellect as the ‘light of angels’, and in a verse in *Zabur-e Ajam* (‘Persian Psalms’; 1927), Iqbal says that intellect itself is a form of love though it does not possess that courage which is the essence of love. The chief difference between intellect and love, for Iqbal, lies in the fact that intellect is not suited for the knowledge of the non-temporal.

[24](#) *Reconstruction*, p. 17.

[25](#) ‘In its deeper movement, however, thought is capable of reaching an immanent Infinite in whose self-unfolding movement the various finite concepts are merely moments’, in *ibid.*, p. 6.

[26](#) Iqbal is also indebted to medieval Indian Muslim saints.

Editor’s note: Iqbal cites (*ibid.*, p. 39) the following Qur’anic verses which stress the psychology rather than the content of experience:

By the star when it setteth your compatriot erreth not, nor is he led astray.

Neither speaketh he from mere impulse.

The Qur’an is no other than the revelation revealed to him:

One strong in power taught it him, endowed with wisdom.

With even balance stood he

In the highest part of the horizon:

Then came he nearer and approached,

And was at the distance of two bows or even closer—
And he revealed to the servant of God what he revealed:
His heart falsified not what he saw:
What! will ye then dispute with him as to what he saw?
He had seen him also another time
Near the Sidrah tree which marks the boundary:
Near which is the garden of repose:
When the Sidrah tree was not covered with what covered it:
His eye turned not aside, nor did it wander:
For he saw the greatest of the signs of the Lord (liii, 1–18).

[27](#) Ibid., pp. 21–22.

[28](#) Ibid., p. 21.

[29](#) Ibid., p. 25.

Iqbal and Indian Sufism

Iqbal had a paradoxical personality, by which I mean that his attitude to problems that he was concerned with was never of a uniform order. The only factor that gives an identity to his diverse attitudes is his intense passion for Islam, in all its diverse cultural manifestations. Since this identity was not of a static sort, sometimes, and at some levels of his personality, it also becomes rather enigmatic. The source of this enigmatic aspect seems to be his deep concern for human culture as a totality. Probably this deep concern creates a tension between the polarities of human existence. One such tension, which dominated his personality as a historic event, arises out of the dialectical relation between time and eternity. An instance of this tension is the existential anguish provoking a feeling of insecurity that eternity may devour time, particularly in its present. Iqbal's changing attitudes to Sufism represent the dual aspects of this basic, call it ontological, dialectical relation and the feeling of personal anguish born out of it. In the first half of his poetic career, if the earlier romantic phase is excluded, his attitude towards Sufism is that of ambivalence. One may cite instances of this ambivalence not only from his correspondence with his contemporaries but also from some of his powerful though seldom sublime poetry. He emerged as a forceful votary of power and visualized God as a majestic being; he wanted to see man as a representative of this majesty, liked to see him as a rider on destiny and a creator of a new earthly world order, or in other words, liked to see the kingdom of God established on earth. He looked contemptuously at pure aesthetic values, disregarded Hafiz¹ and called Plato a dreamer. Between the divine polar attributes of *jadal* (majesty) and *jamal* (beauty) he opted without any hesitation for the former and subsumed the latter in it. Since chronologically it was also a popular phase of his poetry, the impression

was created, which still subsists, that Iqbal, in his poetry and thought, represents a powerful voice against not only the Sufi but also Sufism in its totality. This impression gathered some force also because he vehemently opposed the monistic schools of Sufis and regarded it as a source of the decay of eastern civilization. It may even be asserted that this anti-monistic phase of Iqbal's poetic life, being a popular one, contributed to the rise of anti-Sufi movements in modern Indian Islam. One of the paradoxical aspects of the modern movement is its convergence with the revivalistic trends, since religious modernism tends to be a-spiritualistic and a-mystical.

This, however, is only one side of the picture. The post-*Asrar-e Khudi*² phase of Iqbal's poetry gradually unfolds the mystical dimensions of his personality which were obviously latent until then. Since this trend unfolded itself more in his Persian poetry, and even more systematically in his *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*,³ it did not immediately catch the readers' attention. As a perceptive writer on Sufism has rightly pointed out, *Reconstruction* may be rightly described as 'an attempt to reinterpret in a humanistic spirit the spiritual experience of the Sufis, especially the Persian Sufi heritage'.⁴ Iqbal's 'reconstruction' expresses in a systematic philosophic language the sentiments and ideas presented in his mature poetic works, like *Payam-e Mashriq* (1923; 'Message of the East'), particularly 'Lala-e Tur' ('Tulip of Sinai'), *Zabur-e 'Ajam* (1927; 'Persian Psalms') and his long poem *Javid Nama* (1932; 'The Song of Eternity'). In his style he comes closer to Hafiz, especially in *Payam-e Mashriq* and *Zabur-e 'Ajam*, but in content he joins the mainstream of Sufi thought and the cluster of feelings which the Sufis and particularly the great Indian Sufis had represented. This change was a radical one and yet could not erase the impression created earlier that he was intensely anti-monist. In the Indian Sufi tradition he was actually closer to Sheikh Ahmed Sirhindi than the earlier monistic Sufi masters. Before we proceed further, two important factors have to be kept in mind which are essential for a proper understanding of the Sufi poetry of Iqbal. First, Iqbal did not belong to a particular Sufi order and there is no evidence that he followed a path other than the intellectual and the poetical one(s). Second, though the first statement is factually true, Iqbal had been involved in an intense search for a guide or a *pir*, and it is probable that, since he could not

get a living guide who could satisfy his deeply felt longing and his higher spiritual needs, he turned his gaze towards the spiritual past of Islam and found in Rumi a guide who could lead him to the destination which was not less than the stage of the majestic *muqam-e kibriya*.⁵ Rumi had seen the possibility of a lone seeker being spiritually guided by a *pir* who may be physically absent. He declared:

When the Pir has accepted thee, take heed, surrender thyself to him, go, like Moses, under the authority, of Khidr ... (Qur'an). God has declared that his hand is as His own, since He gave out (the words) the hand of God is above their hands. If any one, by rare exception, traversed this way alone (without a Pir) he arrived at his goal through the help (and favour) of the hearts of the Pirs. The hand of the Pir is not withdrawn from the absent (those who are not under his authority) his hand is naught but the grasp of God.⁶

Was Rumi just a myth created by the poet merely for legitimacy, or was he really Iqbal's guide under whose guidance the poet traversed his path, apparently alone? One has to seek internal evidence from the intensity of his poetic style and the growing conformity with the Rumian path. Rumi had become the spiritual and poetic guide of almost all the post-Rumi mystical poets of the entire Islamic Sufi world. Rumi had himself inherited the dynamic-humanistic mystic way from his immediate predecessors, like Farid ud-Din Attar, but his powerful voice and mystical fervour had set a new trend and tradition in Sufi poetry, the contents of which were not very much different from the theosophic monistic world-outlook of Ibn al-'Arabi. Ibn al-'Arabi's sophisticated, intellectual terminology was, however, hardly accessible to the poetically inclined Sufi, for whom the vision was more attractive than gnosis. For the purposes of the present discussion, it is more important to note that though Iqbal was not attracted by the more abstruse Ibn al-'Arabi, his total poetic personality underwent a great change under the spiritual impact of Rumi. He was of course drawn towards Rumi during the phase of *Asrar-e Khudi*, but the internal evidence, corroborated by his correspondence,⁷ suggests that it was around the 1920s that Iqbal was able to absorb the Rumian spirit. Rumi's spirituality can be defined in terms of a dynamic monism, which is distinguishable from the similar or

not so different monistic spirit of Attar. It was this dynamic element which drew Iqbal completely towards Rumi, to such a degree that he surrendered himself to his guide.

Iqbal still remains the poet of the self (*khudi*), but his concepts undergo a transformation and acquire a spiritual content which was not so much evident in *Asrar-e Khudi*. In *Asrar-e Khudi*, *khudi* had a moral content and therefore the stress was more on individuation. The dialectical tension between individuation and unification—the motive force of most of the Islamic Sufi poetry—had not yet risen. For the first time this dialectical tension emerges in *Payam-e Mashriq*, becomes more pronounced in *Zabur-e 'Ajam*, and becomes heightened in *Javid Nama*. The Indian Islamic Sufi tradition, perhaps with the exception of Sirhindi, presents many instances of this tension, but since the Indian Sufi tradition had become bound by orders of *salasil*, one can find it mostly in the instruction of the *pirs* to the *murids* or disciples, in the literature of the type entitled *Adab al-Muridin*.⁸ The fact, however, remains undisputed that the Indian Sufi tradition had been resolving this tension in a higher synthesis of unification, called subsistence through extinction, where the principle of individuation does not remain ultimate. Sheikh Ahmed Sirhindi, in spite of his impact on the theologically inclined Sufi, remained an isolated example.⁹

To come back to Iqbal, one instance, centrally important is the changing content of the concept of *khudi* as mentioned earlier. How Rumi treats the term ‘self’ or *ana* becomes evident from his references to al-Hallaj in his *Masnavi*:

Uttering ‘I’ in an improper moment is a blameworthy part, uttering the same ‘I’ in a proper moment is a blessed act. The ‘I’ of Mansur [al-Hallaj] certainly becomes blessed, the ‘I’ of Pharaoh, be sure, is accursed. (ii, 2522, 3)¹⁰

For a proper appreciation of the changing meaning of *khudi* in Iqbal’s poetry, we may turn our attention to one of the most significant mystical poetic treatises of Iqbal, *Gulshan-e Raz-e Jadid* or ‘The New Rose Garden of Mystery’. *Gulshan-e Raz* of Mahmud Shabistari¹¹ had an important influence on the development of Indian and Central Asian Sufism, not only

because of its intensity and depth, but also because of its famous commentary *Miftah al-i`jaz fi sharh Gulshan-e Raz* (1412) of Lalhiji Nur Bakshi. Shabistari has a pronounced faith in unityism or monism. Iqbal's treatise of the same title, with the addition of *Jadid*, written in the same metre, answers the same questions, originally raised in Shabistari's treatise. The purpose of this venture, according to Iqbal, is to arouse the passion for mystical vision which was one of the unique properties of the faithful, but, alas, which is no more to be found. He declares:

The East is devoid of passion, and is a corpse without any signs of life. It does not know what the passion for life consists in, the people of the East do not have any spiritual direction and hence I have chosen to write the answers raised in Mahmud's treatise in a new way. My soul has become the battle-field of life and death and my gaze is on abiding life.¹²

But how is this immortality (*baqa*) to be achieved? Interestingly, *baqa* or abiding life had been one of the dominant passions of Iqbal and certainly his entire poetic philosophy is a spiritual voyage to this destination. *Gulshan-e Raz-e Jadid* provides the answer to this question in a unique way, and ultimately one is reminded of al-Hallaj's immortal 'I' which has been so picturesquely expressed by Rumi.

A study of a few questions picked by Iqbal from Shabistari's treatise and the new answers given by him reveal the intensely felt and experienced unityist passion. The first question, raised in *Gulshan-e Raz-e Jadid* is about meditation, *tafakkur*.¹³ Shabistari, in his reply, clarifies that meditation consists of 'seeing' the whole in the 'part', and in this process the wayfarer leaves behind his self, here symbolized by the staff of Moses, and his internal sense hears the voice, 'I am none else than God', and 'one has to keep both eyes opened lest the vision is distorted'.

Iqbal's answer is not much different in substance, though couched in metaphors exclusively his own. Iqbal declares:

The light in the heart of man is both presence and absence. This light is Self which is stationary as well as dynamic, it is fire as well as light, if you use the weapon of argument it appears as fire, if it is seen with the spirit of Gabriel it is light. Sometimes you find it bound in clay and at

other times you see it free from space, sometimes it appears time bound and at other times it manifests itself free from the bounds of time. Sometimes it appears weary and at other times you see the limitless ocean in its Goblet. It is the ocean and also the staff of Moses, heaven and earth are mere stages, in reality it moves lonely in the caravan of life. Iblis and Adam are his manifestations, if you close one eye you see the *Khalwat* (solitude of eternity), the right way is to keep both the eyes open, since seeing through one eye is a sin, keep both the eyes open: the unity of the apparent and the hidden discloses itself. If you seize both the worlds, the worlds may die, yet you become immortal. Do you long for God? Then come closer to your self.^{[14](#)}

The message is clear. The self is a concentrated spark of the universal light, the illumination of the divine. This self is a blessed 'I', as Rumi has designated the 'I' of al-Hallaj.

The second question/answer is much more mystical:

What sort of ocean is being, knowledge only its shore, what pearl, deep down lies unknown?

The life of spirit is the infinite ocean, awareness and consciousness are its boundaries, it is a deep infinitely deep and ever moving ocean, thousands of mountains and deserts are found on its shores. Its waves being restless, each wave leaps out from its shore, is never lost in the desert. It is like a mirror which reflects the entire universe. The perfection lies in existence, its destiny is to become 'witnessed', for a witness. World is nothing but an epiphany of the self, without us there is neither sound nor light, put yourself like a spark in the universe, attack the entire order of existence, all that is in space and outside space.^{[15](#)}

The last line is a favourite theme of Iqbal, repeated in different metaphors, on many occasions. The slain and the one who slays being one, the duality does not arise. In yet another poem, in *Bal-e Jibril* ('Gabriel's Wing'), Murid-e Hindi asks his *pir* about the reality of *jihad* (holy war). Pir-e Rumi answers: 'Break the image of the Real through the command of the Real, smash the glass house of your friend with His own stone'.^{[16](#)}

'How does the union of the contingent and the necessary Being become

possible and what does far and near, more and less mean?’ It is again a question raised by Shabistari. Iqbal’s answer is unequivocal so far as the possibility of union is concerned.

Time and space are relative, heaven and earth are also relative, the light of the heavens alone is Absolute. I do not see time in the inner depths of my being, it is I who has created the months, years and days and the nights. The duality of the spirit and body is merely a game of Semantics. To see them separate is forbidden (for the wayfarer). Thy place is beyond the world of events, seek that right which has no left.¹⁷

The message that reality, being unitary, ‘union alone leads to the knowledge of the Real’ is very clear.

Two questions, in this series of questions, deserve our serious attention, one regarding perfect men—a favourite question of the gnostic Sufis including Shabistari—and the other regarding the *ana al-Haq* of al-Hallaj—the most controversial and also the most favoured issue among classical Sufis. Shabistari regards the perfect man as that unity of being or that microcosmic totality which is identical with the absolute unity. He is the one and the many since man being the viceregent of God, his image must reflect the entire world. The viceregent ought to be the image of the one whose viceregent he is. But one needs vision to comprehend his unity-in-diversity. But, again, Iqbal’s answer is unequivocal:

The moment you open your eyes to the inner recesses of your heart, you see your destination inside yourself. Do not seek the limit, Being has none of it, to reach any limit is to become devoid of life. Never to reach the limit is life everlasting, voyage alone is life immortal. The glow and favour of love is not subject to death, certitude and the vision too have no end. The vision of Being is the perfection of life, its way is liberation from the bonds (of space and time). One who receives the grace of ‘seeing’ is the spiritual leader, you and I are imperfect beings, he alone is perfect who has ‘seen’. Do not lend your hand to the Legist, the Sheikh and the Mullah, do not act like a fish, ignorant of a snare (those three being snares for the seeker), we are blind and the Perfect Man alone has sight.¹⁸

Ibn al-`Arabi had defined the perfect Man as the unity of all the names of God embodying their reality and Shabistari has said 'world becomes Man and Man world'. Both Ibn al-`Arabi and Shabistari used theosophic language. Iqbal is the authentic voice of the Sufi seeker longing for vision. The two voices, however, converge and the perfect man is the microcosmic reality. Iqbal echoes the same view in *Javid Nama* where he clearly states that life consists in seeing the divine self without any veils.

The last question to be considered here concerns *ana al-Haq* of al-Hallaj. Is there a secret which *ana al-Haq* reveals or was it merely idle talk? Shabistari's answer is unambiguous: Where is the other? Each particle of the universe, at each moment of time repeats the same phrase. The moment you move from the knowledge of unity, of the vision of the unity, you might also declare 'I am the Truth'.¹⁹ Iqbal says,

I am restating the mystery of *ana al-Haq*. I am revealing it before the people of Hind and Iran. A magician said in a monastery: Life in a moment of self delusion uttered 'I'. God is asleep and our existence lies in His dream, our existence and our manifestation is a dream of God, above and below and the four dimensions are dream, rest and journey, desire and seeking are all dream-like events, the waking heart and the piercing intellect are dreams, doubt, thought, judgement and belief are all dreams.

Iqbal declares that

the self does not belong to the world of senses, it is beyond their access. If you look at your self you will pass beyond doubt and conjecture. Consider self as Truth, when it is fortified it becomes immortal. The separation of the lovers is union itself. The transient life becomes immortal through love and passion. The world is transient.

And again:

Self alone is enduring, the rest is nothing. Lose yourself in yourself to discover your true self, declare *ana al-Haq* and be your own authentic companion.

Has not Iqbal echoed the sentiments of Rumi and asserted the high status of al-Hallaj? A point, however, needs clarification: what does the statement ‘the separation (*firaq*) is union itself mean? Iqbal repeats his preference for separation on a number of occasions in his poetry, on account of which some commentators of Iqbal had identified him with Sirhindi. This identification is misleading. Even according to the authentic monist Sufis, ‘the perfect man is in constant separation’. It looks paradoxical and yet it is a consequence of the dynamic monism of Islamic Sufis, whose unityistic view is radically different from the Mayavad monism. The perfect man is in constant movement to the being of God and yet there is no end to this movement. Divine epiphanies are endless. As Ibn al-`Arabi says, ‘There is no repetition in Divine Epiphany’. Iqbal restates that position in a style of his own:

The body of the clay is a veil for the self, its emergence is like the rising of the Sun, the Sun of Self shines inside our heart, the evolution of the clay in us is through the essence of Self. ... travel in the inner world of your self and see what this ‘I’ is.

Gulshan-e Raz-e Jadid is the re-instatement of the Sufi position in a new poetic style; it has set before the poet new ideals and new values. *Javid Nama*, the poetic account of Iqbal’s heavenly journey, represents the consummation of the ‘new life’. To quote one instance: The poet meets Vishwamitra (*jehan dost*), the Indian Saint, during his heavenly journey. A piece from the dialogue between the poet and *jehan dost* illustrates the poet’s position unequivocally and emphatically:

He (*jehan dost*) asked, ‘Death of the reason?’ I said, ‘Giving up thought’.
He asked, ‘Death of the heart?’ I said, ‘Giving up remembrance’.
He asked, ‘The body?’ I said, ‘Born of the dust of the road’.
He asked, ‘The soul?’ I said, ‘The symbol of the God’.
He asked, ‘And Man?’ I said, ‘One of God’s secrets’.
He asked, ‘This science and art?’ I said, ‘Mere hush’.
He asked, ‘What is the proof?’ I said, ‘The face of the Beloved’.
He asked, ‘The commons’ religion?’ I said, ‘Just hearsay’.
He asked, ‘The gnostics’ religion?’ I said, ‘True seeing’.²⁰

¹ Editor's note: Muhammad Shams ud-Din Hafiz or Hafez (d. 1389/90), regarded as one of the finest lyric poets of Persia, is said to have transformed the traditional ghazal into a form of freshness, perfection and subtlety as exemplified in *Divan*, a collection of his poetry.

² *Asrar-e Khudi* (1915; 'The Secrets of the Self'); see, *The Secrets of the Self*, trans., Reynold A. Nicholson (Lahore: Sheikh Muhammad Ashraf, 1944).

³ Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934; Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 1994).

⁴ T. Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 252.

⁵ Editor's note: *Muqam*, or *maqam*, 'place of residence', refers to various spiritual stages that periodically marks the long path a Sufi travels to reach a vision of and union with God, or *muqam-e kibriya*. The order and number of the *muqam* differ among the Sufis. The major stages are that of *tawba* (repentance), *wara`* (fear of God), *zuhd* (renunciation or detachment), *faqr* (poverty), *sabr* (patience or steadfastness), *tawakkul* (trust or surrender) and *rida* (satisfaction).

⁶ Jalal ud-Din Rumi, *Masnavi-ye Ma`navi* ('Spiritual Couplets'), trans., R.A. Nicholson (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1950).

⁷ The reference here is to *Iqbal Nama*, a collection of Iqbal's letters to various people, compiled by Sheikh Attaullah (Lahore: Sheikh Muhammad Ashraf, n.d.).

⁸ For instance, works by Abu Najib as-Suhrawardi, 'Umar as-Suhrawardi and Syed Muhammad or Khwaja Banda Nawaz of Gulbarga.

Editor's note: The original sense of *adab* was simply 'norm of conduct' or 'custom'; in its intellectual aspect *adab* evidenced wide secular erudition and also engaged with questions of theology, philology and literary criticism in a style rich in vocabulary and idiom. *Adab al-Muridin* ('The Primer of Etiquette') is a classical text by Abu Najib as-Suhrawardi (d. 1168), who founded the Suhrawardiya movement, noted for the severity of its spiritual discipline, in Baghdad. It was further developed by his nephew 'Umar as-Suhrawardi who wrote the oft-translated *'Awarif al-Maarif* ('The Well-Known Sorts of Knowledge').

⁹ Sirhindi himself admits that he 'discovered' his doctrine of *shuhud* through *kashf*. Sirhindi's own *pir*, Khwaja al-Baqi Billah or Nakshbandi (d. 1603), was a unityist or monist, as the former's *Maktubat* indicates.

¹⁰ Pharaoh said: 'I am reality', and descended to the lowest depths; al-Hallaj uttered *ana al-Haq* and attained deliverance (Rumi, *Masnavi-ye Ma`navi*, v, 2035).

¹¹ Editor's note: Sa'd ud-Din Mahmud Shabistari, also Shabestari (d. 1320), was a Persian mystic whose poetic work *Gulshan-e Raz*, 'The Mystic Rose Garden', trans. E.H. Whinfield with notes, (Islamabad: Iran Pakistan Institute of Persian Studies; Lahore: Islamic Book Foundation, 1978), is regarded as a classic of Sufi literature. In *Gulshan-e Raz*, a recluse from the temporal world engages

with mystical doctrines in the form of questions and answers.

[12](#) Cited from Iqbal's collected works (Persian), *Kulliyat-e Iqbal* (Lahore: Sheikh Gulam Ali and Sons, 1990), p. 537.

[13](#) *Tafakkur* (meditation), in the terminology of Sufism, is defined as the voyage of the wayfarer to the stage of (*spiritual*) disclosure.

[14](#) Iqbal, *Kulliyat-e Iqbal*, p. 541.

[15](#) Ibid., p. 543.

[16](#) Iqbal, *Bal-e Jibril* (Lahore: Sheikh Gulam Ali and Sons, 1935), p. 180.

[17](#) Iqbal, *Kulliyat-e Iqbal*, p. 546.

[18](#) Ibid., pp. 561–63.

Editor's note: All further citations are from the same section of *Kulliyat-e Iqbal*, unless specified otherwise.

[19](#) Shabistari, *Gulshan-e Raz* (trans. E.H. Whinfield).

[20](#) *Javid Nama*, trans., A.J. Arberry (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1966), p. 41.

Iqbal on Time and Self

Iqbal is, perhaps, the first among poets and philosophers in the East to have realized the importance and significance of time. He had the privilege of having a poetic vision of the highest order, and was able to see reality beyond the logical categories of thought and make this direct vision of reality the object of his philosophical speculation. It was not as a mere philosopher that he became conscious of the significance of time and becoming. On the contrary, it was the poet who forced the philosopher to turn towards the immediate facts of experience. This poetic vision of Iqbal makes him unique in the poetic tradition of the East.

One of the presuppositions of the East consisted of a belief in the unreality of time and the insignificance of history. The mystic tradition, which had greatly inspired Persian and Urdu poetry, contributed considerably to this indifference to time and history. As McTaggart has pointed out, mysticism has always been averse to the idea of the reality of time.¹ This is more true about post-Islamic Persian and Indo-Muslim Sufi tradition, particularly in the realm of poetry. In Indian Sufism, probably because of the 'Indian' influence—a predominant preoccupation was 'flight from time'—this indifference to time becomes more marked. Indian thought had generally been anti-historical. Consciousness of time in the Indian philosophical and artistic tradition leaves little or no place for historical time. The cyclical concept of time which is a decisive element in the time-consciousness of the East could not accommodate the idea of human advance in time, nor could it permit the idea of an incomplete universe subject to growth. This frame of mind, on the one hand, scorns at the idea of man seeking self-fulfilment on this earth, and, on the other hand, identifies salvation with some sort of non-existence or extinction of the human self. The archetypal 'wise man' in the classical Persian poetry of

Hafiz and Khayyam takes spiritual delight in ‘running away’ from time and seeking refuge in ‘wine’, which seems to be a symbol of ‘flight from time’.² This feeling of life-weariness notwithstanding, there is a sublime moment in the poetry of Hafiz which comes from his attitude of joyous aesthetic surrender, instead of mystic self-annihilation, the common choice of the Sufi as the only means of spiritual perfection.

Between the ‘aesthetic surrender’ of Hafiz and the self-extinction of the other Sufi poets, there was also a Dionysian moment present in classical Persian poetry; this moment is represented by Rumi. His poetry reveals a Dionysian urge—an impatient desire—to meet and to become one with the source of life and being. This eternal source is also the future end of man, and in this journey forward, love is the only reliable guide. It is undoubtedly a flight from the world of events into eternity, but it is no longer a flight of a wearied soul, disillusioned by the ravages of time. More than a flight, it is a spiritual journey in which man is called upon to collect all his physical and spiritual resources and to direct them towards the fulfilment of his mission to which he is committed since pre-eternity (*azal*). This passion makes him, not weary, but, impatient with the slow-moving world of instants and points. Man’s time-consciousness, in this passion, transcends the slow successive stages of serial time and he experiences the ‘intersection of the timeless with time’. In this transformed consciousness, he finds no sympathy for inert creatures; instead, there is a longing for the company of the ‘conquerors of destiny’.

*Ba hamrahan-e sust a’nasar dilam girift,
Sher-e Khuda wa Rustam-e dastanam arzust.*

The word ‘wish’ (*arzu*) points to a future which is distinct from the present and the normal human past. In this experience time acquires a significance and meaning, and a mystic who undergoes this experience, in the words of T.S. Eliot, conquers time through ‘Time’. Love, a dynamic principle, is Khidr, the archetypal guide of the Sufi, and the alchemy or spiritual transformer in the upward journey. One finds oneself in a world different from that of Indian mystics whose attempt was to reach their goal through a contemplative attitude. To quote Browne, ‘It is here especially that the emotional character of Sufism, so different from the cold and

bloodless theories of Indian philosophies, is apparent'.³ This emotional warmth and fervour could not, however, find its echo either in the Persian poetry of India or in Urdu poetry. Instead of the enthusiasm of Rumi and Attar, most of the Indian Sufi poets prefer an attitude of life-weariness and despair. Poetry becomes the only means of salvation and everything else has only a mere symbolic value. The transitoriness of life becomes the dominant motif in their poetry and the world is often represented as a pilgrim's inn where he has to stay only for a short sojourn.

True, the idea that human life is transitory is an essential element of religious consciousness, but given the manner in which it was articulated in the Indo-Muslim Persian and Urdu poetry, it lost a great deal of this religiosity. It was, rather, associated with an indifference to the higher values of religious life itself, as envisioned by the prophetic religions, which include this earthly existence too. However sublime the intention of the traditional Sufi-inclined poet, the outcome had been a feeling of futility and absurdity, an attitude quite antithetical to the prophetic passion of changing the world. The idea expressed by Hafiz: 'Talk of the minstrel and the wine and seldom seek the meaning of the mystery of the world, as thou can't unravel it by the aid of thy philosophy' (*'Hadis-e mutrab-o-mai go wa raz-e dehr Kamtar ju; / Kih kas nakashud wa na khushayad ba hikmar een mu`ama ra'*), dominates classical Urdu poetry. Hafiz had at least an element of existential anguish, but in the hands of decadent poets the formal element becomes so dominant that, to quote Schimmel, genuine religiosity fades away and there remains nothing but a spiritual play, *Geistreiche* as Goethe has put it.⁴

In the history of Indo-Muslim tradition, Ghalib⁵ is undoubtedly the first poet with a clear philosophical inclination in whose poetry vitalistic and futuristic elements assert themselves. It is significant that Iqbal, in one of his earlier poems, compares Ghalib with Goethe. There is undoubtedly a kinship between these two; if 'ceaseless striving' has a meaning in itself for Goethe, 'striving even if it is of no consequence' (*'woh jo ik lazat hamari sai`ye behasil mei hai'*) is a source of joy for Ghalib. This analogy was, perhaps, symbolic; Iqbal had already been inspired by the European vitalistic philosophical attitude, the best representatives of which in European poetry and literature were Goethe and Nietzsche. As an authentic

poet he had to 'discover' his roots in his own tradition, and he discovered them in Rumi and Ghalib. What struck him in these poets was their latent Faustian-Promethean spirit of which he was going to be the most articulate spokesman in the East.

One of the outstanding features of the Faustian spirit is the preoccupation with time, as it is the agent of transformation. Goethe had made a significant declaration that 'Time is his field', and Iqbal felt that it represents a 'problem of life and death'.⁶ Schimmel, an Iqbal scholar, wants us to believe that in this preoccupation with time, Iqbal's motive is not merely religious or mystical. He has a deeper metaphysical and ontological motive. His main question relates to the ontological vocation of man, and his answer is that it lies in the transformation of the entire human situation. He judges even the worth of the mystic unitive experience by its capacity to transform the human situation. Prophets and saints enjoy the common unitive experience. The latter aim at self-transformation whereas the former employ this transformed self for a radical change in the human condition; hence Iqbal's preference for the former. The result of the unitive experience for the saint is that he ceases 'to be', while a prophet 'becomes' a destroyer, a creator, and an agent of change. Iqbal's strong passion for the prophetic example does not betray his revivalistic attitude; on the contrary, it indicates a passion for time as against the static eternity of the mystic, a search for reality in the process of becoming rather than a changeless being, a passion for striving against the traditional quietist attitude, and, above all, a desire to plunge into the process of history for the creation of novelty. It is from this point of view that Iqbal represents the voice of modernity in the East.

Some of the essential features of modernity are represented by the acceptance of time, of change, and a preference for history against the timeless principle of eternity. Without a sound historical consciousness, time becomes a mere structureless flux and duration a contentless process. There cannot be any controversy regarding the fact that Iqbal is much indebted to Bergson for his appreciation of the principle of time, but what makes him different from Bergson is his deep involvement in the principle of history. So far as the nature of time is concerned, Iqbal agrees with Bergson that time is 'duration' and that serial time is an abstraction from this process of duration. This serial time is a mental construct in the making

of which the category of space plays a dominant role. What is considered as time by the scientific observer is a magnitude, and what is called time by a commonsense view is a spatialized version of time as duration. Not only Iqbal but Whitehead, an eminent mathematician and philosopher, also agrees on principle with Bergson on this issue. A careful study of Bergson and Iqbal reveals, however, certain subtle distinctions between their approaches to the problem of time and becoming. Bergson is interested in the emergence of novelties true to his philosophical vocation as a biologist and, therefore, insists that the doors of the future remain completely open. For him, it is more with reference to the future that the real nature of time can be grasped. Theoretically speaking, this Bergsonian view saves freedom from the clutches of determinism and maintains the purity of novelty, but does not give us a comprehensive account of time.

To take time seriously is to take all its aspects into consideration. Time has three significant aspects: becoming, duration, and eternity; they give meaning to the three phases of time, respectively past, present, and future. If time is merely becoming then the past will have no meaning, it is on account of duration that time passed is connected with time passing. If time is merely duration, then the distinction between present and future will have no meaning. It is on account of eternity that the future attains its identity. Eternity is duration in its aspect of limitless possibility, and becoming is duration in its aspect of present change. From the point of view of value, these three aspects of time are represented by destruction, endurance or conservation, and creation. Destruction is real because time is becoming, endurance or conservation is possible because time is duration, and creation is possible because time passes into eternity, making creation an eternal order.

In this discussion on time, one important factor is, however, overlooked, and that is the man who 'intuits' time. Past, present, and future have no meaning in a non-human world. In the absence of human consciousness, world is a mere series of changes. Change acquires the character of becoming in a world inhabited by man. It is only in the human world, and on account of the human effort, that destruction, conservation, and creation are connected together in a process of history. It is one of the greatest achievements of the poetic genius of Iqbal that he presented a vision of time which is comprehensive of all its diverse, and yet connected, aspects.

It is commonly observed that to the sensitive consciousness of a poet the devastating aspect of time, i.e., the destructive aspect of the process of becoming, reveals itself in an all-embracing form. Shakespeare very intensely felt that everything in nature seemed to be at war with time; he wrote 'nothing 'gainst Time's scythe can make defense'.⁷ The first significant vision of time in Iqbal's poetry carries a tragic feeling, that there is nothing permanent in the world of nature, not even beauty. The conventional Neoplatonic world-outlook, a common heritage of Persian and Urdu poets, is shattered. It is not the beautiful—an appearance of 'beauty' which was supposed to be eternal—alone which is subject to decay, beauty itself is perishable. Iqbal in a significant poem, 'The Essence of Beauty', makes beauty confront God, and with this poem a new, and thereafter recurrent, theme enters into Iqbal's poetry—man's confrontation with God. Beauty puts a simple question to God, why was it not made immortal, free from the onslaught of death? Beauty is informed that the world is a tale of a long night of separation, it has the stamp of change in all its phenomena and carries within itself the seeds of its destruction. These words of God create a commotion in the heavens and on earth and the whole cosmic atmosphere is filled up with a deep sense of sorrow. This poem seems to be a turning point in the poetic career of Iqbal. In the background of the poem lies massive nature with its cosmic time in which the element of transitivity, so essential an element of human time, seems to be missing, but the poetic imagination fills the gap between cosmic and human time. The planets bear the stamp of eternity and yet share the fear of death as soon as the divine word is spoken. The 'devouring Time' leaves nothing untouched. This creates a feeling of anguish for the future, which is the anguish of existence itself. How can one conquer time, and, in this instance, overcome its destructive/devouring aspect? Doesn't nature conserve anything? Goethe had felt that the proposition 'Nature should allow such high spiritual energies to perish [to be] wholly out of question, [for] she never squanders her capital in such fashion'.⁸ In one of the poems of his second phase, after his return from Europe, 'To the Students of Aligarh', Iqbal finds an answer to this tormenting question of endurance or conservation. There is a possibility of escape from the destructive play of time, and it lies in the inner depths of the human personality itself; in the burning passion itself

lies the secret of melody, passion is the only guarantee of endurance in this sorrowful world of appearance. Love and ardent passion, as the means of survival, become the central concepts of Iqbal's mature poetic philosophy. The artistic genius of ancient India, in the symbolism of the 'dance of Siva', has discovered the cosmic truth that creation and destruction are only two sides of the same process. In the Zoroastrian symbolism, Zurvan, the genius of cosmic time, creates and uncreates things and is the guardian of the cosmic process.⁹ Iqbal has used the Zoroastrian symbol, Zurvan, as the disclosure of the mystery of time. In his long poem, *Javid Nama* (1932; 'The Song of Eternity'), the description of his heavenly journey, the poet puts the question regarding the essence of time to Zurvan, and the latter speaks:

Said Zurvan: I am the destroyer of the world
I am invisible to the eyes, yet I am manifest.
All thine efforts are linked up with my Destiny,
The buds blossom into flowers on account of me,
The seed shoots up on account of my upward fight.
Every separation becomes a union on account of my grace.
I turn indifferent, then I speak with affection,
I make you thirsty, then I quench your thirst,
I am the Life, I am the Death, I am the Resurrection final,
I am the Judgement, I am the Hell, I am the Paradise, I am the Houri.
Adam and Eve are my captives,
The world of day and night my offspring.
I am the flower which you pluck from the bough,
I am the Mother of everything which you perceive,
The world is a captive of my spell,
It is my passage that makes the world grow old every moment of its
existence.¹⁰

This Zurvanite spirit prevails in another significant poem 'The Melody of Time' ('Nawa-e Waqt')—in *Payam-e Mashriq* (1923; 'Message of the East')—in which Time, in the first person singular, declares, 'I am the sword that destroys the world / I am life abundant / I am the clothing of Man / I am the garment of God'.¹¹

In his first long poem, *Asrar-e Khudi* (1915; 'The Secrets of the Self'), written in the form of the classical *masnavi*, Iqbal sees in the march of time the secret of creation:

Phenomenon arise from the march of time,
Life is a part of the contents of Time's mystery.
The cause of Time is not the revolution of the sun;
Time is everlasting, but the sun does not last for ever.

.....

Our Time, which has neither beginning nor end,
Blossoms from the flower bed of our mind.
Life is of Time and Time is of Life:

'Do not abuse Time' was the command of the Prophet.¹²

Time, which is the secret of the creative process, is the Bergsonian 'duration', the essence of *elan vital*, and the specifications of time are abstractions from the process of time, from 'the march of time'. These specifications are not senseless; the self creates them for its creative purposes, and to be fully conscious of the mystery of time is to 'know' that they are not the final word on time. The conquest of time lies in the consciousness that time is an indivisible process, the *dahr* of the Arabic language, to which a 'holy' status has been accorded by the Prophet. The Prophet 'knew' this mystery, and thereby conquered time, and became the transformer of history. It is interesting to remark that the prophetic event of ascension (*mi'raj*) symbolizes, for Iqbal, an expansion of the consciousness of time, by which the near and the far lose their distinction.¹³ It is by this conquest of serial time that man realizes his destiny and becomes 'free' (*hurr*).

To come back to the question of endurance or conservation (*dawam*), Iqbal is emphatic that it lies within the creative possibilities of man. Human ego, or self (*khudi*) grows in time, which is the nucleus of 'historical time'. Self is finite and yet has the immense capacities of infinite growth, and as it is finite by its nature, this infinite growth is endless and eternal. Growth happens in time, and, therefore, time itself is eternal, which means that the order of creation is itself an eternal order. Eternity is another name for infinite possibilities, and the actualization of these possibilities needs

infinite time. The world itself is incomplete, hiding in its bosom infinite possibilities of growth, which necessitates that creation go on forever. The inanimate universe 'grows' eternally, because God, the eternal creator, has assumed the 'responsibility' of disclosing possibilities. The story of the human world is, however, different. Here, the possibilities are to be made actual by the efforts of man, as he has assumed the responsibility of his world by accepting the role of vicegerent (*naib*).¹⁴

Iqbal is in full agreement with the humanists that man makes his own history. As all that happens does not endure, all happenings are not historical. The past which could become 'the past in the present moment' alone is historical. Conservation or endurance implies the presentness of the past and its capacity to become an element of the future, i.e., acquiring eternity. In 'The Secrets of the Self' (*Asrar-e Khudi*) Iqbal declares that the deeds of 'free man' alone are capable of such endurance. In other words, it means that history is made by 'free men' and not by slaves. Slaves are the captives of days and nights (*ayyam*), and they identify destiny with what happens to them as if everything that happens is predetermined. Free man, on the contrary, is a creator of his destiny. To use the words of Spengler, he wills history; history, for him, is not that which happens. Iqbal would have agreed with Heidegger that destiny is a mode of authentic existence and that everything does not have a destiny. If man becomes a thing he loses his destiny, he acquires it by becoming free. To act freely is to act historically, and to act historically is to defy death. A past which is not part of anyone's consciousness is a dead past, and it is not the historical past. Iqbal has treated this aspect of time most artistically in his poem 'The Mosque of Cordova' ('Masjid-e Qartuba'). A visit to the mosque of Cordova, in Spain, once a great centre of Islamic civilization, is an occasion to plunge into the historical past, which is also his own past. It is not a moment of an intellectual-remembering of history; rather, he lives 'history' in that moment. The barriers that divide the present from the past are broken, the gulf is so narrowed that past becomes continuous with the present and his imagination leads him to a future which awaits a living, historically conscious, community, and which will happen only if the community can gather its resources to connect it with a new future. The mosque is not for the poet, to use the words of Spengler, an ever-becoming space, it presents

itself to him as a part of the ever-becoming time. The past presents itself in that authentic present which has been called by Heidegger the 'moment of Vision'.¹⁵

'The Mosque of Cordova' starts with the suggestion that all events are painted on the canvas of time and the essence of life and death lies embedded in this order. Death is the ultimate end of all those who live an unauthentic life. Nothing escapes the inexorable law of extinction, not even the so-called miracles of human creation. But there is an exception. Art which is the creation of an authentic genius—the man of God—escapes the vagaries of time; the shadow of death does not fall upon it. As the deeds of an authentic person are illumined by love, death is forbidden to them. The wave of time moves fast, it tends to take away every happening; yet love works as a bulwark against the flood of time. Love transcends the present instant; love alone endures, free from the limitations of 'is' and 'was'. No 'deed' in itself is subject to death or is capable of endurance. The deed in the creation of which the 'blood' of the agent is mingled defies extinction. Such deeds are the creation of the authentic ego, and endurance is the reward of authenticity.

This summary of the poem suggests that the sources of endurance are not different. The source is one and that is authenticity achieved by an ego who conquers serial time. There is a close relation between duration and endurance. Those who enjoy duration and rise above serial time also enjoy endurance. To have a destiny is to conquer death, but the conquest of death is not possible by evading it and losing oneself in the world, it is possible only by raising oneself beyond the threshold of the present and performing deeds which leave their mark on history. Thus, to have a destiny is to become historical. Iqbal has made it very clear in his *Reconstruction* that there is neither an obligatory immortality for each believer nor eternal damnation for all the infidels. Life, according to him, offers a scope for ego-activity and death is a challenge to this activity. It is only by deed that the ego prepares itself for its continuance after death. Personal immortality is not to be conceived as a right; it is to be achieved by personal effort. Immortality is not the cessation of time; time comes to an end only for those who could not earn survival. What is called 'hereafter' represents a different order of time, because the growth of the finite ego still continues

and never comes to an end. What is commonly called eternity is a form of 'futurity', and the 'eternal future' is not a blank as the human self grows continuously.¹⁶

One very important consequence can be drawn from this discussion, which is latent in his poetry and quite explicit in his *Reconstruction*: human self and time go together. There is no experience outside time. There are, however, different orders of time, and different levels of the experience of time. Even the highest mystical experience cannot happen outside of time, it only involves a different level of time, designated duration, or 'change without succession'. Time is not to be identified with mere succession; duration is a higher term as succession itself involves duration. It is clear that time, so far as human experience is concerned, is not a myth. Is it a myth or a useless term where ultimate reality is concerned, and particularly when this ultimate reality is conceived as God? Iqbal's answer is that it is definitely a myth, if by time we mean only succession. God is definitely outside the temporal order, although this temporal order is not outside God. If the eternal 'now' of the divine self is properly understood, then God can be conceived as the whole of time, present in each of creation and yet not identical with any. If time is understood in terms of its specifications, then ultimate reality is timeless, but as time is not exhausted by its specifications, there is a sense in the statement that time is an essential element in reality. This statement cannot be proved by any logical argument; it can only be understood and appreciated by an analysis of our inner experience.

Iqbal believes that one need not go beyond conscious experience to understand the nature of reality. His is the phenomenological method. Our conscious experience alone can be our starting point. This conscious experience, our point of departure in all knowledge, gives us a clue, declares Iqbal, about the concept which reconciles the opposition of permanence and change, of time regarded as an organic whole or eternity, and time regarded as atomic. If we then accept the guidance of our conscious experience, and conceive the life of the all-inclusive ego on the analogy of our finite ego, the time of the ultimate ego is revealed as change without succession, i.e., an organic whole which appears atomic because of the creative moment of the ego.¹⁷ Iqbal has conceived God as free creative

activity, and no limit can be imposed on this type of high freedom. Difficulty arises if time is understood, like space, as a limited concept. In this sense, reality is outside these limits. Space and time are nothing but interpretations which thought imposes upon the creative activity of the ultimate ego. They can also be considered as the possibilities of the ego, only partially realized in our mathematical space and time.¹⁸ As possibilities will turn into impossibles if they are not conceived of as belonging to the being of which they are possibilities, time, and even space, are in some sense essential elements of reality. Possibly, it is the limit of finite human intelligence so far as the mystery of time is concerned. As Whitehead has declared, it is impossible to mediate on time and the creative passage of nature without overwhelming emotion at the limitations of human intelligence.¹⁹

¹ J.M.E. McTaggart, *Philosophical Studies* (London: Edward Arnold, 1934), p. 113.

² One is reminded of Hafiz—such lines are frequent enough in his poetry, for example, in *Fifty Poems*, trans., A.J. Arberry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947), p. 134:

‘Tis a famous tale, the deceitfulness of earth;
The night is pregnant: what will dawn bring to birth?
Tumult and bloody battle rage in the plain:
Bring blood-red wine, and fill the goblet again.

³ E.G. Browne, *Literary History of Persia*, 4 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928) vol. I, p. 442.

⁴ Annemarie Schimmel, *Gabriel’s Wing: A Study of the Religious Ideas of Sir Muhammad Iqbal* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1963), p. 63.

⁵ Editor’s note: Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib (1797–1869), one of the most important Urdu poets, renowned for his ghazals, letters and prose pieces is equally renowned for his poems and prose in Persian. His writings are seen, in many ways (especially since he leaves nothing unquestioned, not even his own feelings), as bridging the medieval and the modern sensibilities.

⁶ Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934; Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 1994) p. 132.

⁷ William Shakespeare, sonnet xii (‘When I do count the clock that tells the time’), line 13.

⁸ J.W. von Goethe, *Wisdom and Experience*, Prose Selections by Ludwig Curtius; trans. and ed. with

an introduction by Hermann J. Weigand (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1949), p. 139.

⁹ Editor's note: Zurvanism, also Zervanism, is a modified form of Zoroastrianism that appeared around the third century in Persia. As opposed to orthodox Zoroastrianism that had become dualistic in doctrine by that time, Zurvanism held that limitless, eternal and uncreated time is the source of all things. Zurvan is the God of time and fate, appearing in two forms: as limitless time, or eternal lord, and as lord of all existing things.

¹⁰ *Javid Nama* in Iqbal's (Perisan) collected works *Kulliyat-e Iqbal* (Lahore: Sheikh Gulam Ali and Sons, 1990), pp. 613–14.

¹¹ *Kulliyat-e Iqbal*, pp. 259–60.

¹² *Asrar-e Khudi* in *Kulliyat-e Iqbal*, pp. 71–72; the reference in the last line is to the *hadith* '*la tasabbu al-dahr*'.

¹³ *Javid Nama* (Lahore: Sheikh Gulam Ali and Sons, 1932), p. 20.

¹⁴ This theme is discussed in *Reconstruction* and is also poetically treated in *Asrar-e Khudi*; see, *The Secrets of the Self*, trans., Reynold Nicholson (Lahore: Sheikh Muhammad Ashraf, 1944).

¹⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans., John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), p. 241.

¹⁶ *Reconstruction*, pp. 112–17.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 46–47.

¹⁹ A.N. Whitehead, *The Concept of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1920), p. 246.

Iqbal and the Existentialist Thinkers: Nietzsche, Kierkegaard and Heidegger

Iqbal's poetry is rooted in the best traditions of Indo-Muslim poetry, both Persian and Urdu, and he proudly calls himself a spiritual disciple of the medieval Islamic sage, Jalal ud-Din Rumi. A careful study of his philosophical poetry, however, reveals that he is one of those few Asian poets of modern times who have been successful, in an extraordinary manner, in giving a highly philosophic-poetic expression to the contemporary twentieth-century mood which is a continuation of the revolt against the absolutistic world-outlook of the European rationalists, particularly of Hegel. It can be suggested that Iqbal discovered Rumi only after he had already come into intellectual contact with western philosophy and literature. It was after his acceptance of the philosophies of 'life' and 'will' that he felt drawn towards this great master of Persian literature. Rumi had also raised his powerful poetic voice against the static intellectual world-outlook of the medieval Islamic *mutakallimin*. Rumi, like al-Ghazali, had been himself a great scholastic theologian but experienced a deep spiritual crisis and became an ardent Sufi, in search of a personal God. Iqbal's final choice of Rumi as a spiritual teacher represents his conversion to the way of theistic mysticism. The motivation that works behind the choice of a spiritual guide—if the decision to choose one is an authentic act—is so complicated and even mysterious that an intellectual analysis of it is not possible. Iqbal underwent a deep spiritual crisis during his stay in Europe and came under the impact of western thought, though he had already been exposed to it. A comparative study of his poetry before and during his stay in the West reveals the nature of his spiritual anguish. A familiar system of beliefs was completely shattered. His stay in the West

coincided with the flowering of the philosophy of will and life. There was a sudden rise, under the impact of the advance in biological sciences, of those moments of western thought which were implied in the philosophy of Descartes and Leibniz, which pointed the way towards the interpretation of reality in subjective terms. As Windelband puts it, there was in the epistemology of modern philosophy from its beginning a superiority attributed to inner experience. Even in British empiricist philosophy the preponderance of the inner experience had asserted itself.¹ Descartes' *cogito ergo sum* and the assertion of the empiricists that our knowledge of our own states is intuitive converged on the primacy of the subject. Kant's critical philosophy and his transcendental method also made the subject the source of the organization of knowledge. In these schemes, the self was either the reasoning self or the sensing mind. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were dominated by the physical sciences and hence there was a supremacy of cool reasoning and of the method of mathematical and logical deduction. A great revolution in the western intellectual world took place with the discovery of the principle of organic evolution. The biological sciences introduced a new vision, and a new—hitherto inconceivable—question was raised: Can the universe be understood in terms of life and will? 'Will' is a more primary fact of life than reason which emerges later in the cosmic stage. Religious consciousness had already suggested this explanation but in the absence of scientific thought to support it, it had fallen into obscurantism which resulted in the surrendering of the world to an arbitrary God. In this scheme the finite human will was submerged into the supreme will of God, the best examples of which are St Augustine and the Ash`arites.

The new vision of reality as an expression of will found its most powerful exponent in Schopenhauer, for whom the entire phenomenal world is the objectification of a single will, the will to live. This new philosopher of will reduced all diversity and multiplicity of existence to one all-devouring will, and the old God of reason itself was declared to be a mere instrument of the almighty will. The traditional God of religion was also declared to be a redundant hypothesis. The subjective principle was given a new dimension in the conflict between reason and will, and the balance was tilted towards the principle of life. Schopenhauer still adhered

to the European monistic tradition and the a priori logical method, but his disciple, the passionate poet-philosopher Nietzsche, found in him a new prophet in whose philosophy of will there was an answer to the urgent needs of the time. The will to life was transformed into the will to power with which a new mission of the revaluation of human life and its destiny was introduced in the western tradition. The introduction of the element of power was not an entirely new venture in western philosophy. In the monadistic philosophy of Leibniz and the ethics of Spinoza, which had inspired the poetic philosophy of Goethe, it had been clearly implied but had not become the central theme of any philosophical system. Nietzsche read in the whole drama of human civilization an antagonism of two factors which he called 'Dionysus' and 'Apollo'. This represents the conflict between voluntarism and intellectualism, or in other words, between Schopenhauer and Hegel. As the Dionysian element becomes ascendent in the poetic philosophy of Nietzsche, an uncontrollable longing for a strong, masterful and creative personality and a passion for boundless individualism find expression in a grand style, again a new element in modern philosophical tradition. The cool, logical and deductive method gives place to an aphoristic poetic style. It is from the standpoint of power that Nietzsche sets up the ideal of superman (*Urbarmensch*) in contrast with the ordinary, everyday, average man of the common herd. To this superman of the future is assigned the task of revaluation of all values. The guidelines of this revaluation will not be any transcendental reason but the authority of the superman who will be the final judge. As God is declared to be dead, the superman has to take charge of the future course of the evolutionary process.

Nietzsche was not merely giving expression to his boundless uncontrollable individualism, he was also voicing the sentiment of his age which could not find satisfaction in traditional religious norms. It was Nietzsche's conviction that the 'future man'—who will be guided by an indomitable will, and will not look to any transcendental source of morality—will create a new morality, a morality which will be 'beyond good and evil' and to which the question of truth will be irrelevant, the fundamental question being whether it furthers life and promotes power. Nietzsche was in one more way voicing the sentiment of his age. The age was tired with philosophers who were merely interpreting the world, as his contemporary

Karl Marx put it; the age demanded a philosophy which could change the world. The philosopher was being asked to become the legislator of humanity and a prophet who has to create a new order of existence. Nietzsche highlighted these two important elements—which were lying dormant within and found expression occasionally in philosophers of religion, like Pascal—in the western philosophical tradition. These elements are the immediacy of personal experience and passion. It is in this sense that Nietzsche is a philosopher of existence. Marx who retained the western tradition of logical deductive method, however, shared the passionate element with Nietzsche. These two powerful voices of the nineteenth century made the human situation the central point of their philosophical thought. The notion that man is the maker of history was passionately shared by Marx and Nietzsche. Both dethroned the God of religion. One gave to the superman the place hitherto occupied by God, and Marx, as Jaspers puts it, transformed history itself into a tribunal in the place of God.² The belief that they have a prophetic mission to fulfil is also a common point between Marx and Nietzsche.

The spiritual kinship between Iqbal and Nietzsche is so obvious that it does not need a detailed analysis. Iqbal was overwhelmed with the power-doctrine of Nietzsche and set before himself the task of combining power with religion. He wrote: ‘Religion without power is only philosophy. This is perfectly sound position and this very idea has urged me to write a *masnavi* about this truth’.³

Iqbal learnt from Nietzsche that the philosopher has to become a prophet, and under his influence, introduced the idea of future man, the viceregent of God, as a biological necessity. Under Marxian influence, Iqbal thought of the future race of mankind as possessing a revolutionary democratic element. Iqbal’s admiration for Marx and his message remained a constant motif in his poetry till the end. Marx envisaged the proletariat of industrialized West as the agents of the future and Iqbal urged upon the Muslims to be the initiators of a new age and a creative civilization. Iqbal tacitly agreed with Marx that humanity needs new masters. Iqbal’s famous poem in *Bang-e Dara* (‘The Call of the Bell’), ‘Khidr-e Rah’ (‘Khidr, the Guide’) presents a unique synthesis of Marx and Nietzsche.

In his guide, Rumi, Iqbal discovered elements of passion, love, and the

primacy of the immediate experience. Iqbal discovered new elements in the poetic philosophy of Rumi, and there can hardly be any doubt that it was Nietzsche who aroused Iqbal from his pantheistic slumber and helped him find in Rumi a passionate longing for a personal God who is not only an object of love but is also an embodiment of power. It was again under the influence of Nietzsche that he raised the status of man in the scheme of existence. Of course, he did not abandon God in his moment of spiritual crisis, as Nietzsche did, but discovered that there is a third possibility, and that was to make man a co-worker with God. The source of this idea does not seem to lie in traditional Islamic literature. His study of the Zoroastrian religion and the influence of Nietzsche, along with other trends like humanism, inspired him to see in man a potential creator and a co-worker with God. It is not enough to cite Qur'anic verses to prove that Iqbal drew inspiration exclusively from Qur'anic and other Islamic sources in developing his idea of man as a co-worker with God.⁴ As medieval theosophists of Islam drew heavily from the Christian idea of logos for their theory of the 'reality of Muhammad', so Iqbal was influenced by western sources. True, he revived some of the forgotten moments of Qur'an, but he did it under the impact of western thought.

Similarly his idea of the conquest of destiny was influenced by Nietzsche who called upon the present generation of human beings to alter their destiny. Everyone does not have a destiny. Heidegger himself owes this notion to Nietzsche. Undeniably this was one of the clear lessons of *Thus Spake Zarathustra*.

A third important element in the poetic vision of Iqbal is his rejection of the idea that reality can be comprehended by discursive thought alone. This rejection follows from the notion of the primacy of immediate personal experience. It is not a novel idea either from the point of view of the history of Islamic or western philosophy. In the Islamic tradition al-Ghazali had emphasized this and Sufi poets had also dwelled on this. Nineteenth-century western thought revived this idea with a greater vigour, and helped to make it an essential element of modern philosophical and aesthetic sensibility. Nietzsche declared that his project was to view science through the eyes of the artist, and art through the eyes of life.⁵

With the nineteenth-century philosopher of existence, Kierkegaard, Iqbal

has many things in common. Iqbal might not have come under the direct influence of Kierkegaard, but it is sufficient to note here that it was Kierkegaard who initiated a religious revolt against the absolutist philosophy of reason, and discovered new possibilities of understanding religious phenomena. Kierkegaard was primarily an artist who turned into a philosopher of existence. According to an account in his autobiographical essay, 'The Point of View for My Work As an Author', Kierkegaard experienced a deep spiritual crisis which ultimately resulted in his conviction that he had a special calling. Sensitive souls of the nineteenth century who had a deep awareness of the human situation really believed that the world needed a messiah. Even the atheist Marx spoke in the prophetic manner. Kierkegaard sincerely felt that he was an exceptional individual to whom God had assigned the noble mission of reviving New Testament Christianity in order to resolve the moral and religious crises that his contemporary world was going through. His entire career as a thinker and writer was subordinated to the single task of trying to transform his age morally and religiously. His style of writing followed this vocation. He wrote in the most concrete and individual manner and always had a strong affinity with Socrates. If Rumi was the spiritual guide of Iqbal, Socrates held a similar position for Kierkegaard. He strongly felt that a true religious insight must recognize human finitude as well as the imperative to be free as an authentic individual. Behind the Christian emphasis on human misery lies the important idea of human finitude, which does not deny the immense possibilities of human personality. Christianity wanted to offer man a true perspective; Kierkegaard, like Pascal, had the ambitious drive to revive this perspective which he felt his age lacked. From the point of view of method, he felt that the logical deductive method was far from satisfying this need. He wanted to discover the truth which is true for oneself, i.e., existential truth. Kierkegaard believed that the idea of pantheism deadens spiritual life, and unless pantheism is completely banished a genuine and robust religious life is not possible. The essence of Christianity, he believed, is opposed to all dogmas of pantheism and absolutist monism. These few points are sufficient to suggest the kinship between Iqbal and Kierkegaard. Iqbal also held the conviction that he was reviving the original prophetic monotheism which is opposed to all forms of pantheism. He too believed that religious truth cannot be explained in a dry logical form. Nor was he less emphatic

about the notion of human finitude and the impossibility of man becoming infinite. He too had a feeling of intense loneliness like Kierkegaard. He declares in 'The Secrets of the Self' (1915; *Asrar-e Khudi*) that 'he is the voice of the poet of tomorrow'. Again, like Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, he felt a strong aversion to the crowd.

The Godless Nietzsche preferred the solitude of the superman to any form of community, but for Iqbal, particularly, and Kierkegaard, between the crowd and the solitary authentic individual there lies the possibility of an authentic community. In spite of his opposition to the Church, Kierkegaard did not entirely rule out the possibility of a fellowship of the Church, although he feels it to be a distant possibility.⁶ For Iqbal, however, community or *umma* is always a living reality. It was on this account that his long poem 'The Secrets of the Self' was followed by another long poem 'The Mysteries of Selflessness' (1918; *Rumaz-e Bikhudi*). Community for him was a temporal manifestation of the eternal. As Kierkegaard's rejection of pantheism and the Hegelian universal was total, he could believe in only two terms, i.e., a personal transcendental God and the dependent finite man, who as a lonely individual stands before God, like Abraham, supported by his unconditional dedication to God.⁷ As Heinemann points out, Kierkegaard's defence of the particular against the universal is noteworthy as it becomes a recurrent theme of later existentialists.⁸ It is very clear that Iqbal could not go to this extent in his opposition to monism or pantheism, as his religious model was the Prophet of Islam who in his own lifetime founded a community of believers. This major difference is also due to the fact that Iqbal and Kierkegaard, passionate thinkers in their own right, had different passions in their lives. Kierkegaard's passion was to restore the perspective of the New Testament and Iqbal's passion was to revive the original perspective given to the world by the Prophet of Islam, as understood by him.

A major criticism by Kierkegaard of Hegelian absolutism had to do with the problem of change and becoming. It was not the problem of change or becoming as such with which he was concerned; it was rather the problem of change as it occurs to one who is involved in becoming oneself. One common characteristic of the philosophies of existence is their indifference to logical thought. The degree of this indifference, of course, varies among

thinkers of this type. Kierkegaard is one of those thinkers who have little patience with logic. He believes that neither abstract nor pure thought can grapple with existence. He admits that abstract thought, by which he means the general scientific way of thinking, is relevant and useful so far as non-existential fields of empirical sciences are concerned, but he is not prepared to accept that pure thought, by which he means the Hegelian method, has relevance to any level of knowledge. The main reason for his opposition to the Hegelian approach is its identification of the structure of thought with that of being. This identification, in the opinion of Kierkegaard, makes Hegel unable to appreciate the finite mode of existence or the concrete being. For him there are only two modes of being, that of God and that of the individual. He refers to them as God's eternity and existence respectively.⁹ God's being in his eternal actuality and eternity belongs to him alone. The finite beings have a peculiar relation with God. They are neither cut off from him nor can they be identified with him. In a certain sense, God 'includes' the order of existence in himself, but their being included is not by way of a necessary dialectical identity, as Hegel conceived it, but by God's free, creative causality. The peculiar feature of the being of finite existences is their becoming. Kierkegaard charges Hegel with being unable to understand real change which necessarily follows from his general failure to grasp the meaning of finite existences.¹⁰ Movement is the qualifying feature of finite reality. He refuses to believe that movement is mere appearance. He is more in agreement with Aristotle than Hegel, so far as movement and its reality are concerned. The law of reality for finite existences is to persevere in becoming through time.¹¹ In his scheme, real necessity, eternity, and immutability belong to God alone. The world of finite existences is marked by contingency, temporality, and change. This way of looking at finite existence makes history also contingent. The historical process is contingent, and is based on a free relationship between man and God.¹² It means that the future is unpredictable. As existential thinking is intensely practical, existential truth remains unfinished, because it refers to beings who are involved in constant striving. It is on this account that, according to Kierkegaard, existential truth is paradoxical.¹³ Temporal existence, i.e., the mode of being of finite existence, is future-oriented, and the watchword of existence is forward.¹⁴ For the man of true belief, time

and its process offer an occasion. Time is significant because it is in the temporal order that the eternal is immanent.

As time and becoming are real there is a place for novelty in history. As James Collins puts it, Kierkegaard's defence of novelty in human life makes him different from those existentialists who dwell exclusively upon the despairing and compressed face of things.¹⁵ There is hope in future because man can share in God's eternity by his own free choice. This choice is of a religious nature and it makes man authentic. Choice is the only way which makes one a unique personality. The choice to live an authentic life involves a leap. It signifies a leap from despair to hope. In his book, *Sickness Unto Death*, he gives an existential account of despair. One who is conscious of having a self and makes a heroic attempt to become oneself again, gains freedom. One who makes a resolve to become again oneself before God is a free man, a man of true faith. It is a passionate decision, and therein lies its existential character.

This brief summary of the central ideas of Kierkegaard on human existence and the destiny of man suggest certain very striking similarities between Iqbal and Kierkegaard. While trying to discover their common points one has to remember that they represent two different religious traditions and belong to two different historical situations. To forget these important points would be to forget the essence (if this word can be used in the context of existentialism) of the philosophy of existence.

Iqbal's disregard of abstract thought and his criticism of the intellectual method as an effective method for the understanding of life brings him closer to Kierkegaard. In his poetry he is never tired of making a comparison between the way of the intellect and the way of the heart. He too does not deny the relevance of the intellectual method, but he repeatedly warns that it has limitations also. In a suggestive line he says, 'intellect is not very far from the threshold of Reality but 'presence' is unfortunately denied to it'.¹⁶ His charge against intellect—that it is unable to comprehend the moving, changing reality, the nature of which is process—brings him closer to the existentialist thinkers. His vehement opposition of all the pantheistic and monistic philosophies was as passionate as that of Kierkegaard. His long poem 'The Secrets of Self' is one of the best poetic contributions to the literature on man's finitude and his existential urge for

transcendence. He, like Kierkegaard, believes that finitude is not a disaster but an occasion. He is, perhaps, the only poet-philosopher in the Islamic tradition who stressed the idea of human finitude in such clear and unequivocal terms. The idea that the relationship between man and God is a free relationship is, again, common to both Iqbal and Kierkegaard. The idea of authentic existence and its relation to time is one more instance of Iqbal's approximation to the theistic existentialism of Kierkegaard. Iqbal also calls his authentic man a 'man of faith' who is guided by love and has a longing to become oneself before God. The idea of 'leap' is one of the recurrent themes in his poetry. In one of his ghazals in *Bal-e Jibril* he had imagined this earth and the skies to be boundless: But a leap inspired by passion/exposed their finitude before me. There are, however, two important points on which there are striking dissimilarities. One is the absence of the idea of despair in Iqbal, an important element in Kierkegaard's thought. The reason lies in their different religious approaches and their models. Two, the ideal religious man of Iqbal has an element of power, whereas power, unlike in Nietzsche, is absent in the thought of Kierkegaard. It is on this account, again, that Iqbal's man of faith is solitary but not lonely. This idea of loneliness brings one more difference to light. Kierkegaard's stress on subjectivity makes any sort of communication impossible. The authentic religious man remains lonely, and there seems to be no way of resolving this loneliness. As Heinemann points out, religion is the 'personal truth of a community' and cannot therefore remain purely subjective; it must acquire some degree of objectivity; and in fact every religion claims a specific objectivity.¹⁷ Kierkegaard did not make a distinction between religiosity and a religious life, which involves some degree of communal life. His passion for subjective truth impelled him to become an extreme 'outsider', although an intensely religious outsider. Iqbal's sober religious attitude makes him see the other side of the religious life which needs a genuine communion between persons of the same faith. Iqbal's man of faith comes closer to Rudolf Eucken's 'person' than Kierkegaard's lonely individual. Iqbal's man of faith integrates himself with the universe and with the human world by an act of integration which also involves transcendence. There is also a deeper reason for the divergence between Iqbal and Kierkegaard. Iqbal

belongs to a religious tradition in which God revealed his command through a person in the form of a Book; in the religious tradition of Kierkegaard, God revealed himself in the historic person of Christ, in whom eternity meets time. When God is conceived as a law-giver, community becomes an expression of God's will. It is, after all, a question of religious phenomenology.

It is in the philosophical thought of Martin Heidegger that the philosophical movement initiated by Kierkegaard reaches its fruition; in him the negative moments of this tradition also come to light. Heidegger belongs to that grand German tradition which is not satisfied with less than a comprehensive, all-embracing world-outlook. He insists that he is not to be remembered as an existentialist, as his preoccupation is not so much with the problem of human existence as an instance of being, man being the only creature who questions being. In spite of his protest against being called an existentialist philosopher, it is a fact that no other contemporary philosopher has given to his age a deeper and more intense awareness about the problem of human existence and its relation to time. There is a paradoxical element in his thought and personality. His commentators describe Heidegger as an atheist, yet there is definitely a deep religious element which permeates his entire thought. He inherited the German religious traditions, and, as the translators of his *Was ist das—die Philosophie?* state, Heideggerian religiosity breathes deeply the air of bohme and pietism.¹⁸

To venture to write about Heidegger's philosophy involves a great risk. His 'hyphenated' expressions and his habit of playing with words make a study of his thought very difficult for a non-German reader. There is hardly any term which Heidegger uses and leaves without giving it a new personal meaning. In a penetrating article on Holderlin, Heidegger remarked that the poet had named the 'holy',¹⁹ but after reading Heidegger one is inclined to say that the philosopher of being feels the 'holy' but does not give it a name. Heidegger is noncommittal about God but his writings create a feeling of awe which is hardly distinguishable from a religious feeling. Marx banished God and gave to history the place hitherto reserved for God. Heidegger gave to Being, which is also designated as the being of being (*Seind des Seienden*),²⁰ an ontological status which would be the envy of God. There is a fundamental difference between the atheism of Heidegger

and of Jean-Paul Sartre. Sartre is generally insensitive to the deeper religious longings of man for which Heidegger's thought shows high concern. There is one more reason to take Heidegger seriously and that is related to the contemporary philosophical situation. Heidegger revived the European philosophical tradition in an age in which the function of philosophy was restricted to the analysis of language, and made the quest for being the central problem of his philosophy. The choice of 'human existence' (*Dasein*) as the starting point of his inquiry about being does not reflect the idiosyncrasy of a philosopher, but, rather, reveals a deep awareness of the problem of being. As he himself puts it, to work out the question of being adequately we must make an entity, the inquirer, transparent in his own being. The very asking of this question, Heidegger states, is an entity's mode of being, and as such it gains an essential character from the inquiry into being.²¹ In his analysis of the human existence, he follows Husserl's phenomenological method, which, according to Heidegger, means going 'to the things themselves'²² or letting the thing show itself in itself.²³

At the preliminary stage of inquiry itself, the question about the meaning of *Dasein* leads to its relation to the phenomenon of time. Since existence is basic to *Dasein*, time becomes of paramount importance. In Heidegger's view, *Dasein* is so intimately related to time that whenever *Dasein* tacitly understands and interprets being, it does so with time as its standpoint. Time has to be conceived, he writes, as the horizon for all understanding of being and for any way of interpreting it.²⁴ Heidegger thinks that various interpretations of being in the history of philosophy failed because of the absence of this perspective. The Greeks failed because they took time itself as an entity among other entities.²⁵ The central problematic of all ontology, for him, is rooted in the phenomenon of time, if it is rightly seen and experienced.²⁶

Thus, when it is rightly seen and experienced, he thinks that *Dasein*'s being finds its meaning in temporality.²⁷ It is on account of this relation of *Dasein* to time that it is historical. Historicity is a determining characteristic for *Dasein* in the very basis of its being.²⁸ In fact, the roots of what is called history lie in *Dasein*'s temporality.²⁹ *Dasein*, i.e., human existence, is temporal and historical. This temporality of *Dasein*, its relation to future,

past and present—which Heidegger labels as the three ‘ecstasies’ of temporality—opens up a new horizon for its study. There is an important difference between Heidegger and other philosophers of time. For him the ‘ecstasies’ of the future are primary. *Dasein* is ‘futural’.

The detailed analysis of this leading idea is cumbersome in his *Being and Time* and entails genuine difficulties in understanding it. Numerous terms are introduced in the discussion and there is hardly any term which is superfluous for the entire thesis. A brief sketch of Heidegger’s philosophy, which leaves out the rich details, is something like giving a substance of a poem in ordinary prose. As a poem is made by words, one can say the same thing about Heidegger’s philosophical prose. An attempt is, however, being made here to state briefly the central doctrine of Heidegger as presented in *Sein Und Zeit (Being and Time)*.

Ontologically, *Dasein* is one unified whole whose essence is existence. It is described as ‘Being-in-the world’. This hyphenated description implies that being, and being in the world, are not two different things. It overcomes the cleavage between consciousness and existence, a legacy of the Cartesians. It does not mean the dependance of consciousness on existence, or the priority of existence over consciousness as emphasized by Marx; rather, it simply denotes the inseparability of human existence from the world.³⁰ There are not two things, existence and the world, or self and the world; there is only one thing, being-in-the-world, or self-in-the-world. This is the genuine ontology of being. There are, however, three fundamental characteristics, or aspects, of this unified structure. They are ‘existentiality’, ‘facticity’, and ‘Being-fallen’ (*Verfallen*). Heidegger does not leave any doubt that these characteristics are not pieces belonging to something composite, one of which might sometimes be missing. He remarks that there is woven together in them a primordial context which makes up the totality of the structural whole which we are seeking.³¹ To this unified whole he gives the name of ‘care’.³²

For a clear understanding (which always remains an unfulfilled ambition) of existentiality and its relation to temporality, an understanding of the phrase ‘facticity’ is a must. Facticity means that human existence always implies being with others. Wherever *Dasein* is, it is a fact; and to the factuality of this fact is given the name ‘facticity’.³³ It implies that *Dasein*

understands itself as bound up in its destiny with the being of those entities which it encounters within its own world,³⁴ meaning, in simpler words, the whole stage of action for human creativity, its possibility, physical surroundings, historical situation, human aspirations, hopes, fears and longings. In the words of Heidegger, *Dasein* finds itself proximally in what one does, uses, expects, avoids,³⁵ i.e., all those things and entities with whom *Dasein* is concerned.³⁶ It signifies man's relation to the world and the historic situation in which he finds himself. It is an idea common to both Marx and Heidegger. It does not make the world subjective, neither is it in the ordinary sense objective. It is related to human reality, and human destiny is bound up with a particular situation. As Marx put it, man makes his own history but only in given conditions. Man finds himself in a world which is not of his making, though he transforms it according to his designs and appropriates it freely, within the limits of historical contingency. Facticity includes historical traditions, and the question that man is confronted with is: Is he going to be dominated by traditions and become its slave, or transcend them according to his historical situation?

The appropriate ecstasies of temporality in this mode, i.e., facticity, is the past. Human existence finds itself bound up with the past and determined by traditions. He has not yet realized its-inmost-possibility. This will lead to a consideration of the characteristics of existentiality. This term refers to the innermost 'Being' of human existence. As Heidegger describes it, it is Being towards one's inmost-potentiality-for-Being. It represents the urge to become one-self. *Dasein*, in this mode, masters situations. The power of becoming is revealed to self. 'Existentiality' means realizing the possibility of being free for its inmost potentiality-for-Being. But, what is this inmost potentiality-for-Being? It is death as end and the limit of human reality. *Dasein* is Being-towards-death. The full existential-ontological definition of death is given in these words: 'Death, as the end of *Dasein*'s inmost possibility-non-relational, certain and as such indefinite, not to be outstripped. Death is, as *Dasein*'s end, in the Being of this entity towards its end'.³⁷ Heidegger makes it very clear that this does not mean brooding over death, or becoming obsessed with the fact of death. It only means that 'it must be understood as a possibility, it must be cultivated as a possibility, and we must put up with it as a possibility, in the way we comport ourselves

towards it'.³⁸ It is the not-yet and as such has to be kept before oneself. This aspect of human existence Heidegger calls 'transcendence'.³⁹ It is going beyond the given, realizing the not-yet, and striving to be one-self. Its essence is freedom. It brings one face to face with the possibility of Being-itself in an impassioned freedom towards death.⁴⁰ Death lies in the future, and hence, the ecstasies appropriate to existentiality is future. *Dasein* is 'anticipation'⁴¹ as a being attuned to his inmost possibility. Anticipation is the possibility of understanding one's inmost and uttermost potentiality-for-Being, that is to say, the possibility of authentic existence.⁴² A being who is attuned in this manner is an authentic being. It involves freedom towards death. The authentic being strives to reach beyond the present, beyond itself. Authenticity as a mode of being, is, in a certain sense, a mode of time.

'Being-fallen' (*Verfallen*) stands in contrast to existentiality. *Dasein* as a being-in-the-world gets absorbed in the world and falls into Being which belongs to everydayness.⁴³ *Dasein* becomes completely fascinated by the world. It is a condition of alienation, and alienation leads by its own movement to *Dasein's* getting entangled in itself. It is also called a downward plunge of *Dasein* (*Absturz*).⁴⁴ Every existential attribute of *Dasein* deteriorates in this condition. Language, a phenomenon which has its roots in the existential constitution of *Dasein's* disclosedness becomes 'idle talk' or gossip. *Dasein* is lost in *das Man*, i.e., the 'they', the anonymous crowd, mankind. 'Care' in this mode becomes 'solicitude' (*Fursorge*).⁴⁵ *Dasein* becomes 'public', which implies a levelling down, averageness and distantiality.⁴⁶ The creative drive is scattered in dispersed directions. It is a running away from one's own self. *Dasein* evades its inmost potentiality. It becomes forgetful of itself, and hence is lost to itself. The fact of being-in-the-world is the basis of being-fallen. One cannot avoid this mode. It is part of the human situation. It is, in other words, the basis of the human tragedy, an unauthentic existence.

The central thesis of Heidegger can be summed up as human existence involving a constant tension. This has been a constant theme of western philosophy. Freedom is born in this tension. For Spinoza man has to choose between freedom and bondage. There is a choice left open for man. Yet, man will always live in a state of tension. There is no such thing as absolute

moksa. In the ethical philosophy of Kant, the noumenal and the empirical selves provide a source of tension. Man lives on different planes. Hegel, Fichte and Schelling, all agreed on this tension in human life. Heidegger affirms the central doctrine of western philosophy: Man is a historic being. He has a time-tension. Authentic existence does not mean a flight from time. It is seeing time in its proper perspective. Time, with its three modes of past, present and future, is an abstraction from temporality. Heidegger writes, 'The conception of future, past and present have first arisen in terms of unauthentic way of understanding time'.⁴⁷ The time which is accessible to *Dasein*'s commonsense is not primordial, but arises, rather, from authentic temporality. Authentic temporality, having its source in a being-to-death, is necessarily finite. Infinite time is a 'derived time', derived from authentic finite time by an unauthentic *Dasein*.⁴⁸ The finiteness of time follows from the statement that authentic time is essentially futural.

It is generally considered that time proceeds from an indefinite past into an indefinite future. Newton and Bergson, in spite of their opposite views on the nature of time, agreed that time proceeds from past to future. Heidegger insists that the phases of time are derived from existential time. Existential time is the primordial, the personal, time. The character of 'having been' (i.e., past) arises from the future.⁴⁹ The basic tense of existential time is future.⁵⁰ It moves out of the future to the present through the past. Unauthentic existence is imprisoned in the past and entangled in the present as a continuation of past, but authentic existence goes out to its future and turns back upon the past to appropriate it; in this manner it understands the present. Present, for it, becomes a moment of vision. In this sense, time is finite. It faces death as a future possibility. The idea of the finiteness of human existence is one of the leading ideas of Heidegger,⁵¹ and in this matter Heidegger represents the general attitude of western philosophy,⁵² which, as Jaspers points out, has been largely influenced by the Bible.⁵³ It is only the authentic existence which has grasped its inmost potentiality-for-being that has a 'destiny'.⁵⁴ *Dasein* as free for death understands itself in its own superior power, the power of its finite freedom.⁵⁵ Only such an authentic being is historical. Authentic historicity and destiny are almost synonymous in Heidegger's scheme. Destiny is created by the authentic individual, who knows his finite

freedom. It is the state of 'fallenness'. There is no destiny. To have a destiny is to have the resoluteness to face death.

When we turn our attention to Iqbal, we find that his poetic vision strives to transcend the narrow limits of the traditional Asian mystic outlook, which runs away from the idea of human finitude and sees in the time-tension a source of evil. Iqbal's poetic vision is time-infused, and he agrees with Heidegger that time is inseparable from being. The terminology used by him is different, but he makes a distinction between authentic and non-authentic existence. His mode of distinguishing between these two ways of existence owes a lot to the western philosophical tradition. Authenticity is not evading the finitude of human existence but lies in the realization of this fact. Finitude becomes an occasion because of the basic human trait of transcendence. For Iqbal, like Kierkegaard and Jaspers, this is transcendence to God. For Iqbal, the finite human existence goes beyond itself and seeks its perfection in becoming the viceregent of God. The theme of death is also a principal theme of Iqbal. His ultimate approach to death is, however, different.

Man faces death and has to become conscious of it. 'Nothing escapes death' is the lesson of his poem, 'The Mosque of Cordova' ('Masjid-e Qartuba'); but man by his deeds inspired by love can overcome death and make it powerless. It is not by evading death and by losing oneself in the world of the crowd that man can conquer death. Iqbal calls this type of existence non-authentic. He writes in *Bal-e Jibril*, if thou think that death is thy liberation, thou are unauthentic. In one of his verses he says, 'The distinguishing mark of a non-believer is that he is lost in the world—The distinguishing mark of a believer is that the worlds are lost in him'. It must be remembered that Iqbal uses these terms, believer and non-believer, as authentic and unauthentic beings. In his 'The Secrets of the Self' he has defined the free man as one who is not dominated by the world, he does not leave the world, but rather appropriates the world and transforms it according to his designs. He has to become the conqueror of destiny. This dichotomy between the slave and the free man is one of the themes of modern existentialism, particularly existential theology. The Russian existential theologian Nicholas Berdyaev makes a distinction between master, slave and free man.⁵⁶ His choice is the free man. Jaspers talks of the

authentic and the unauthentic man. All agree on one point, that freedom has an existential import. It has a deep, subjective meaning. It is not enough to be externally free. Heidegger made it an important idea that freedom is rooted in being and is constitutive of being. Man's being is a quest for freedom. There is, however, a weak side to his philosophy. As his translators of *What is Philosophy?* point out, metaphysical freedom is not enough. Heidegger's failure to include a study of other dimensions of freedom in either the economic, social, or political aspects of existence represents a serious limitation to the full understanding of the dialectical relationship with the meta-physical.⁵⁷

Heidegger's attempt to save ontological freedom from distortions is really a heroic one, but he goes to the other extreme of stopping at the basis. Metaphysical freedom is a necessary basis for other freedoms but it is not full freedom. Again, as his translators point out, 'What must be united is the depth of Heidegger's ontology with Mill's or Jefferson's political wisdom'.⁵⁸ Marx's vision was distorted by his political disciples because the economic category in Marx's thought swallowed all other principles. Heidegger prefers the loneliness of the authentic individual. Iqbal's position seems to be more sound in this regard. He was conscious that 'the secrets of the self' have another side, that of 'the mysteries of Selflessness'. Freedom implies a tension between these two polar concepts. Man is not to lose himself in the public world, in the 'they', in idle talk and curiosity, but has to conquer social relations and find a 'place' for the realization of freedom in this transitory world. Belonging to the world is an occasion. Iqbal makes it clear in a number of places that man has to perfect this world. He says, 'The universe is, perhaps, unfinished—The call of "to be" is ceaselessly being repeated'.

In his Persian poem, 'Dialogue between God and Man' in *Payam-e Mashriq*, he gives poetic expression to the idea of man perfecting the world created by God. It is one of the positive points of Iqbal that he integrated the metaphysical freedom of man with other levels of freedom. If Heidegger talks of man's forfeiture, Iqbal talks of the death of the self. The reasons of this death of the self are not different. The self becomes a slave of the past and present conditions prevailing in the world, with the result that all his creative energies are completely scattered. To possess a self is to

be creative and future-oriented. Creation needs a different perspective about time. The creative man has to overcome the distinctions of yesterday and tomorrow, and grasp the true meaning of time. The unauthentic individual remains a captive of days and nights, and identifies destiny with what actually happens.⁵⁹ The free man is the creator of his destiny because he not only carries the burden of history on his back but he also moves forward.⁶⁰ This means that man lives in a double tension. One is caused by his biological and historical make-up which relates to his past, and the other is caused by his existential tendency to look forward. The tension is not to be resolved by turning away from history, because it would be a turning away from destiny. Iqbal's free-man lives in a state of tension, which is born out of the conflict of the actual and the possible. In his *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* he states:

The life of the ego is a kind of tension caused by the ego invading the environment and environment invading the ego. The ego does not stand outside the arena of mutual invasion. It is present in it as a directive energy and is formed and disciplined by its own experience.⁶¹

The idea that life is a tension and that this tension is to be heightened for the ego's ceaseless striving, an idea developed in his lecture 'The Human Ego, his Freedom and Immortality', is a typically modern idea which makes his philosophy and poetry a part of our modern heritage.

The idea that primordial time is different from time viewed as past, present and future is developed by Bergson, Heidegger and Iqbal, each in a different manner; however, all agree on one point that time and human reality are inseparable and that man in order to become authentic needs a proper perspective of time.

Iqbal disagreed with Bergson on the problem of future but could not relate the past and the present with future. His thought moved in the direction of making future the source of time but he did not work out this idea properly. This idea seems to be rooted in the religious consciousness of man. Plotinus identified eternity with futurity. Man as a being-ahead-of-itself is again an essentially religious idea. For Heidegger, it meant to be authentically conscious of death as a 'not-yet'. Iqbal too thinks human reality to be ahead of itself, but, being a religious thinker, he looks beyond

the grave, a place where all potentialities apparently come to an end. Iqbal thinks that man will move forward in time even after the place has abandoned him. Notwithstanding this difference, the essence of human reality is transcendence for Iqbal. On this point the visions of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Iqbal, Heidegger and Jaspers converge. Is it because, as Jaspers says, of the common religious traditions of Jews, Christians (Greek Orthodox, Catholics and Protestants) and, perhaps, Muslims as well? Perhaps, and may be, then, it is also because of their contemporary world-outlook, which is a time-infused one.

¹ Wilhelm Windelband, *A History of Philosophy* (London: Macmillan, 1957), pp. 466–67.

² Karl Jaspers, 'Nietzsche, Marx and Kierkegaard', *Hibbert Journal* (May, 1951).

³ Cited in Annemarie Schimmel, *Gabriel's Wing: A Study of the Religious Ideas of Sir Muhammad Iqbal* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1963), p. 42.

⁴ A few Pakistani admirers of Iqbal claim that he drew inspiration exclusively from the Book and the traditions; this will look quite extravagant if one considers Iqbal without any 'communal' commitment.

⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo: An Attempt at Self-criticism in The Philosophy of Nietzsche: A Selection* (New York: Modern Library, 1962), p. 937.

⁶ Søren Kierkegaard, *Training in Christianity*, trans., Walter Lowrie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 218.

⁷ This point is discussed in Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*, trans., Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954).

⁸ Frederick H. Heinemann, *Existentialism and the Modern Predicament* (New York: Harper and Row, 1958), p. 34; hereafter, *Existentialism*.

⁹ Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans., D.F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), pp. 108, 195; hereafter, *Postscript*.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 99–100.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 117.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

¹⁵ James Collins, *The Mind of Kierkegaard* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1953), p. 198.

¹⁶ Iqbal, *Bal-e Jibril*, 'Gabriel's Wing' (Lahore: Taj Co. Ltd., 1953), p. 65.

¹⁷ Heinemann, *Existentialism*, p. 45.

[18](#) Introduction, in Martin Heidegger, *What is Philosophy?* trans. and intro., William Kluback and Jean T. Wilde (London: Vision Press, 1955); hereafter, *What is Philosophy?*

[19](#) Martin Heidegger, 'Remembrance of the Poet', in Werner Broch, ed., *Existence and Being*, trans., R.F.C. Hull and Allan Crick (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1967), p. 263.

[20](#) Heidegger, *What is Philosophy?*, p. 68.

[21](#) Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962); hereafter, *Being and Time*.

[22](#) Ibid., p. 50.

[23](#) Ibid., p. 51.

[24](#) Ibid., p. 39.

[25](#) Ibid., pp. 40, 49.

[26](#) Ibid., p. 40.

[27](#) Ibid., p. 41.

[28](#) Ibid.

[29](#) Ibid., p. 433. Heidegger makes a distinction between *Dasein*'s historicity and world-history, by which he means the entities other than *Dasein* and which are historical by reason of belonging to the world.

[30](#) *Being and Time*, p. 31. In this connection, Heidegger makes a sharp distinction between ontic and ontological. The former approach is adopted by the special sciences which divide being, the latter is unified.

[31](#) Ibid., pp. 235–36.

[32](#) Ibid., p. 237. In arriving at this conclusion, Heidegger discusses his much talked about concept of 'dread' or 'anxiety' (*angst*). Anxiety is a basic kind of being-in-the-world (pp. 230–35). Anxiety, as he describes it, does not know that in the face of which it is anxious (p. 231).

[33](#) Ibid., p. 82.

[34](#) Ibid., pp. 153–54.

[35](#) Ibid., p. 155.

[36](#) 'Concern' in Heidegger's terminology is 'a mode of care'.

[37](#) *Being and Time*, p. 303.

[38](#) Ibid., p. 306.

[39](#) Ibid., p. 314.

[40](#) Ibid., p. 306.

[41](#) Ibid., p. 307.

[42](#) Ibid., p. 220.

[43](#) Ibid., p. 223.

[44](#) Ibid., p. 203.

[45](#) Ibid., p. 157.

[46](#) Ibid., p. 165.

[47](#) Ibid., p. 374.

[48](#) Ibid., p. 379.

[49](#) Ibid., p. 373.

[50](#) Ibid.

[51](#) Ibid., p. 376.

[52](#) Heidegger sees in this concept of finitude a leading idea of western philosophy. He interprets Kant in a novel manner and finds that a principal thesis of Kant is the finitude of man. See, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans., James S. Churchill (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962), pp. 226–33.

[53](#) Karl Jaspers, *The Perennial Scope of Philosophy*, trans., Ralph Manhiem (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968), p. 88.

[54](#) *Being and Time*, pp. 436–37.

[55](#) Ibid., p. 436.

[56](#) Nikolai Berdyaev, *Slavery and Freedom* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1944).

[57](#) Heidegger, *What is Philosophy?* p. 14.

[58](#) Ibid., p. 15.

[59](#) Muhammad Iqbal, *Asrar-e Khudi* (1915; 'The Secrets of the Self'); see, *The Secrets of the Self*, trans., Reynold A. Nicholson (Lahore: Sheikh Muhammad Ashraf, 1944).

[60](#) Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934; Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 1994), p. 69.

[61](#) Ibid., p. 97.

The Political Philosophy of Iqbal

I propose to examine here some of the basic ideas underlying the political philosophy of Iqbal. Iqbal demands serious attention because his philosophic-poetic genius represents, on the one hand, a continuity of tradition and, on the other, an attempt to integrate it with contemporary thought with a view to setting tradition in motion in an upward direction. In doing so he attempts to overcome inherited Islamic tradition—a convergence of Ash`arites and al-Ghazali. Iqbal is unique among the contemporaries of his culture in that he combines tradition with modernity with an eye on the future. The concept of the immanence of the future, as a directing energy or a trend which operates in the manner of *amr* (command), is one of the leading ideas of Iqbal in his religio-philosophical reflections. In other words, destiny operates as an immanent factor in the world of man.

To make the discussion precise, it is proposed to describe the philosophical presuppositions which operate as Iqbal's primary vision of reality. These presuppositions are, of course, related to the spiritual culture to which he belonged, but it would be wrong to believe that the entire culture consciously participates in them. It will be more to the point to say that Iqbal interpreted his culture and its future possibilities in the light of these presuppositions.

The important presuppositions of Iqbal's poetic philosophy, which in a direct and sometimes in an indirect manner govern his political thinking, are:

1. that reality is spiritual and its life consists of its temporal activity, on account of which all that is secular is sacred in the roots of its being;
2. that the world of nature, i.e., the spatio-temporal order, and the world

- of man are continuous, the middle term being self or ego;
3. that the finite human ego is so far the highest instance of cosmic evolution, and that it is free; and,
 4. that the direction of human history is the transformation of man into a more perfect being, the viceregent of God, this being the actualization of the 'original trust'.

The last item transforms anthropology into theosophy, the ultimate aim or 'intention' of history being identified with the emergence of 'gnostic beings'. It also gives to history an eschatological dimension.

I call them presuppositions because Iqbal never worked them out in a rigorous philosophical manner, nor did he give reasons, if reason is to be distinguished from analogy, why they should be regarded as true. They can more appropriately be regarded as mystico-poetic visions or as elements of utopic consciousness immanent in his poetic creations and philosophical reflections. I have used the word 'utopic' deliberately to distinguish it from utopia, an ideal construct or an ideal type.¹ It is the presence of these elements which gives a mystic dimension even to Iqbal's political philosophy and eventually fails to relate it to the concrete problems of the contemporary age.

In the light of these presuppositions, it is proposed to discuss Iqbal's idea of the transformation of the problem of leadership, and the meaning of freedom in the world of man. The first had always been one of the dominant concerns of eastern spirituality, to which the problem of human conduct had been related and which gives meaning and significance to political action. To an 'outsider' it might seem preposterous that they are termed as problems of political philosophy, but they acquire significance in the eastern tradition which gives primary importance to spiritual salvation. Since Iqbal belongs more to the mystical than to the politico-legal tradition of Islam, this observation acquires significance.

The Islamic mystic tradition, like all such traditions, gives priority to the vertical dimension of the human personality at the expense of his horizontal dimension comprising of the social and political conditions of his existence and leaves them to historical contingency.

Iqbal's significance as a thinker lies in the fact that he realized the importance of social and political conditions of existence in the scheme of

spiritual perfection. He recognized the existential tension and made a sincere, though unsuccessful, attempt to reconcile the two as complementary poles of human existence. Islamic religious tradition, which after the convergence of Ash`arite theology and mystic illumination in the personality of al-Ghazali had become predominantly theocentric, was given an anthropocentric shift by Iqbal, who declared that man was a co-worker with God. Since religious consciousness repels complete anthropocentrism, it leads to a tension between the two in Iqbal's religio-political consciousness, a tension which also becomes a source of tragic feeling in the last phase of Iqbal's poetry.

Iqbal's attitude to this problem has to be viewed at two levels, which also involves a certain tension between them. One is the fact of change and becoming which for Iqbal, in the tradition of contemporary biological thought, has the status of a natural law that governs the entire universe. It is a fundamental concept which makes the idea of transformation possible. Iqbal, like Kierkegaard, accepts change as a fact of the human world, and has a religious and moral perspective before him. It was not the problem of change as it occurs, or becoming as such with which he was concerned, but rather the problem of change as it occurs to one who is involved in becoming oneself; and this process of becoming oneself, in turn, involves a distinction between what one is and what one ought to be. In other words, transformation involves the idea of 'not-yet', which is one of the recurring themes in Iqbal's poetry. The entire universe along with the world of man awaits at every moment of its life a stage which it has not yet arrived at. Iqbal sees even in twentieth-century science, and particularly in the Einsteinian theory of the 'expanding universe', a powerful argument to support his view of perpetual growth, an instance which goes to show that he was not arguing in a rigorous philosophical manner but seeking analogies to make his point of view tenable. The idea of growth and expansion when combined with his presupposition that the universe is spiritual leads him to believe that it is being which has greater spiritual dimensions. It makes the transition to the ideal of human transformation not only possible but in a certain sense obligatory for men. Man must develop his personality or his ego by transcending the finite material conditions and the spatio-temporal relations, the essential components of his existence. He believes like Bergson that matter is a necessary hindrance to be overcome in

the process of evolution and that it does not have an independent ontological status. Matter itself being a lower type of ego-activity, it offers resistance to the conscious activity of the higher ego which aspires for progressive expansion of consciousness leading to personal immortality.

In a significant note in *Stray Reflections*,² he declared that personality being the dearest possession of man must be looked upon as the ultimate good which must work as a standard to test the worth of our actions. Needless to say he was influenced by Nietzsche but he had motives different from those of his 'Masters'. The existence of the vital impulse makes spiritual transformation not only possible but serves as a necessary condition for this activity. It solves the riddle why Iqbal believes in the primacy of will over intellect. Intellect or reason gives meaning to and seeks meaning in the past, it is will which does so to the future. Whereas the non-existing past acquires meaning through reason, the non-existing 'not-yet' gets its meaning through will. The flux of time, an important notion for Iqbal, does nothing by itself. It is only through the mediating agency of will that transformation becomes possible. Reality of time serves as an essential precondition to make spiritual growth possible. In other words, the universe must be constituted in such a manner that time, however illogical, is its necessary component. Like Kierkegaard, Iqbal believes that existence, is future-oriented, and that the hallmark of existence is a forward movement. If the Socratic maxim was 'Know thyself' from within, the Iqbalian maxim is 'Change thyself from within'. It is only in the process of changing oneself that one gets to know oneself: cognition follows the act of will. The nineteenth century offers two perspectives of human transformation: one is the marxist perspective, shared by later sociologists, that man changes himself in the process of changing the world and also gets to know himself in the process of change. As Marx says, existence precedes consciousness. The other perspective, that of the existentialists and the vitalist religious thinkers, and shared by Iqbal, is the precedence of inner change over external institutional changes. Iqbal calls the former, borrowing terms from Spengler, the intellectual way of making the world our own which consists in understanding the world in a casual manner, and the latter as the vital way of appropriating the universe, which according to him, is what the Qur'an calls *iman* (faith). This vital act too implies a necessity, but different

from the physical one. It is what Iqbal calls 'higher fatalism', without making it clear what is meant by it.

The idea of *iman* leads to the important notion that 'transformation' is an acquisition of *iman*. This vital act results in the complete appropriation of the cosmos in the personality of the agent (*mumin*). The reverse of this is the absorption of human personality in the material universe; in other words, the human personality loses itself in the spatio-temporal order, called serial time: 'Who is an infidel? One who loses himself in the World. And who is a man of faith? In whom the world is lost.' The phraseology reminds one of the 'authentic' and 'unauthentic' of Heidegger, the corresponding states being existentiality of facticity or fallenness.

It is important to note here that in our desire to make Iqbal 'contemporary', we may ignore the danger of giving these phrases a scientific orientation. This vital act is also called 'rebirth' in *Javid Nama* (1932; 'The Song of Eternity' or 'The Epic of Javid'). This symbolism has a close relation to the prophetic symbolism of the 'splitting of the chest', an event which preceded the ascension of the prophet. Corresponding to this transformation on the level of individual personality is the idea of the transformation of the human collectivity. This process of transformation of humanity has to be preceded by what Iqbal calls 'Resurrections': 'He from whose body the pure spirit has departed cannot rise from the dust without a Resurrection!'³ The word 'revolution' which often occurs in Iqbal's poetry has a certain resemblance to marxian terminology, but it should also be noted that Marx had secularized the Semitic archetypal symbolism of resurrection in his revolutionary vision. This resemblance, although a deeper one, is not to be stretched too far. In the political philosophy of Marx, the process of 'transformation' follows revolution, the destruction of the old forces of production and relations, whereas for Iqbal transformation alone guarantees a new social order, as had once happened during the prophetic mission.

This notion of transformation leads to another significant symbol of the 'new man', a passion common to the vitalistic philosophies of Nietzsche, Kierkegaard and also of Marx. Iqbal blends his vision of the 'new man' with the theosophic symbol of *al-Insan al-kamil*, with one important difference: that for the Islamic theosophists, perfect man represents the

essence of creation, logically preceding the creaturely order, whereas for Iqbal, it seems to lie in the future, so far as its collective manifestation is concerned, although its individual prototype lies in the personality of Muhammad.

Is it mere coincidence that while this notion looks exhilarating on the plane of the individual personality, it leads to depressing consequences on the socio-collective level, since it promotes a rather backward-looking revivalistic attitude? It is neither accidental nor a mere wrong interpretation of Iqbal as suggested in his revivalist following. On the contrary, this trend was implied in his vision of the future, because the 'utopic' elements of his vision have a direct reference to the golden past wherein lies the lost utopia, and it is this reference which makes his symbol of 'resurrection' dangerously meaningful. One radical element of his vision was, however, lost sight of by those who sought practical guidance from Iqbal in spite of the Qur'anic injunction not to follow the poets and that was his notion of 'continuous growth' even after resurrection. If resurrection leads to growth on the individual psychic plane, it follows that the same ought to happen on the plane of collective life. It means that reference to the past must lead to an evolution in future, which in turn implies that the real 'historical idea' lies in the future and the point is that for Iqbal the future is not unrelated to eternity, the plane of unrealized possibilities. But a little reflection shows that this analogy is at best a poetic metaphor, since in the spatio-temporal world, the stage of history is different in nature from a possible world, the stage of spiritual growth after 'resurrection'.

One of the significant consequences of this notion of transformation, which has a bearing on the contemporary human situation, consists in the approximation of the secular and the religious. As maintained by Iqbal, the difference between the two does not lie in the act itself, but in the attitude of mind with which the agent performs it. It is the invisible mental background, according to Iqbal, which ultimately determines its character. An act is temporal or profane if it is performed in a spirit of detachment from the infinite complexities of life behind it. It is spiritual if it is inspired by that complexity.⁴ This approximation works effectively only on the ideal plane. The facts of political life, are, however, such that unless the political act is performed by one who is completely transformed, a prophet for

instance, the balance cannot be maintained. Since such moments are very rare in human history, the profane, as it tends to relax the tension of the agent, assumes the guise of the religious or the spiritual, the result being rationalization, which constitutes a great danger to spiritual life.

This observation leads us to the second problem of the agents of transformation or of leadership, one of the most crucial aspects of Iqbal's politico-philosophical vision. Since the later developments of a philosophical genius lie in his primary vision of reality, the question of Iqbal's early vision becomes significant. There is strong evidence to prove that Iqbal 'perceived' reality in its aspect of power, that the *tremendum* overshadowed the *fascinosum*. As early as 1910, he commented: 'Power is more divine than truth. God is power, be ye, then like your Father who is in heaven'. He goes to the extent of declaring 'Power toucheth falsehood, and lo, it is transformed into truth'.⁵ Nietzsche was, of course, a powerful influence, but the important psycho-biographical point is that Iqbal's perception was also responsible for drawing him towards Nietzsche. Power is one of the most recurring themes in the poetry of Iqbal.

The idea of a powerful personality may also be considered an archetypal symbol which aroused conscious admiration at certain critical moments of history, and the nineteenth century seems to have provided a favourable cultural soil to this idea. It was not only Nietzsche, it was Marx too who accepted this notion and transferred it to class. It is also implicit in the religious philosophy of Kierkegaard in the form of the authentic person who takes a decisive leap. Rousseau, with his idea of the Noble Savage seems to have initiated this powerful romantic-philosophical movement and it is on this account that some sort of 'neo-primitivism' in one form or another has persisted as an essential component of contemporary radical political philosophy. In India too the literature of the nineteenth-century in Bengal and Maharashtra eulogized power, which inspired militant nationalism.

Iqbal too believed that a great personality alone can revitalize a dying social organism by the revelation of a new ideal. While Marx saw such new ideals immanent in the current historical situation which can be grasped in the process of social action, to Nietzsche the discernment of these ideals was the result of an inner vital contemplative act possessing a nihilating quality. Iqbal shares this belief with Nietzsche, with the difference that the

discovery of new ideals is an outcome of a mystical experience when it tends to overflow its boundaries, and seeks opportunities of redirecting or refashioning the forces of collective life. 'In this experience', according to him, 'the finite centre of life sinks into his own infinite depths only to spring up again, with fresh vigour to destroy the old, and to disclose the new directions of life'.⁶ The reference here is to the prophet's experience but it is to be noted that the prophet, for Iqbal, is more a model for humanity than one who merely belonged to one particular moment of the past history of mankind. In Bergsonian language, the higher ideal must become incarnate in a privileged person who becomes an example. Iqbal had a glimpse of the later Bergsonian idea in his earlier poetic symbol of the 'free man' who has to be a model for the 'bondsman', an idea which was implicit in Bergson's concept of time and free will.

It is 'free man' alone, Iqbal believes, who can initiate a new social order and restructure the existing institutions. He has a strong belief that

self concentrated individuals are the only effective power to counteract the forces of decay and such individuals alone reveal the depths of life. It is only through them that new standards are disclosed in the life of which we begin to see that our environment is not wholly inviolable and requires revision.

It is upon such self-concentrated individuals that the title of *mumin* (man of faith) is conferred. He is also called *qalandar*, an archetypal symbol, whose important attribute is voluntary poverty (*faqr*). It is the privilege of such persons to enjoy 'pure duration' through their initiative power and have a glimpse of the eternal. The inference is clear: only those who have 'discerned' the nature of reality can bear the burden of changing the world. They are those who carry the trust (*al-amanat*).⁷

This notion too works quite neatly on an ideal plane but the question remains unanswered as to how they can be induced to act as agents of change. Iqbal faces the same difficulty as was once faced by Plato and since Iqbal's passion to transform the existing reality was so strong and his faith in powerful persons so unshakable, he had to create certain myths. The unfulfilled mission of Islam was one such myth and to perceive it as real, he endows this art of spiritual greatness to such historical persons as Nadir

Shah and Abdali,⁸ because they unified the Iranians and the Afghans. He could tell his western counterparts that we too had our Bismarcks and Mazzinis. In his heavenly journey, Abdali is recognized as

The leader of all the martyrs of love
Glory of India, China, Turkey and Syria
Whose name is more resplendent than the sun and the moon,
The dust of whose grave is more living than I and you.

A serious question arises here: how can one judge the authenticity of such great men who are supposed to be the guardians of human destiny? Iqbal offers the pragmatic test. He can believe that it works satisfactorily when it is applied to the prophetic personality.

But can it work as effectively in relation to the Nadir Shahs and the Abdalis? It is a question which Iqbal never asked nor answered. History is a poor judge to tell us who was and who was not a false prophet, since historical judgements are never completely free from subjective preferences and, second, all pragmatic tests have a reference to historical time which makes it difficult for a judge to look at this question from the perspective of eternity, as eternity alone changes history into simultaneity, and therefore, historical judgements involving a reference to value remain ambiguous.

Coming to the problem of freedom, one may feel tempted to ask if freedom and power, as embodied in a powerful personalities like Nadir Shah and Abdali, can go together. The answer is both yes and no. If the word 'freedom' is used in the sense it is used in ordinary language, the answer will be a simple 'no', because the freedom of a powerful person puts limits on and tends to negate the freedom of the rest. The answer is also 'yes' since power cannot be achieved without the possibility of freedom in the universe. A little reflection reveals that the situation is, however, not so simple and since the terms 'power' and 'freedom' carry some ambiguity, the intention of the speaker has to be studied. It becomes much more imperative when the speaker happens to be a poet too.

Undoubtedly, Iqbal had a great passion for both power and freedom. His selection of characters in the context of *Javid Nama* indicates that there was a shift in the meaning of the word *saltan* ('power'). In the beginning of the poem, the word meant spiritual power and at the penultimate stage, the

meaning shifted to political power. The other word used often by Iqbal in his poetry is *quahiri*, as opposed and also as complementary to *dilbari*. The term *khudi* itself carried both the notions of power and freedom, and hence, it is not to be confused with the term *atman* or simple *nafs*. The simple subject 'I' acquires egohood when it is free and powerful, and acquires them through love, *'ishq*, which is a vital force. Since this vital force is the mediating term, good becomes identical with it and consequently freedom loses its ethical content and becomes synonymous with freedom to acquire power, which means it cannot be shared.

Bergson and Iqbal present an interesting parallel. Bergson's open morality transcends precepts, depends upon models, on lives which are sources of inspiration and on experiences not amenable to discursive expression; so does Iqbal's notion of freedom. It can be 'enjoyed' by a powerful ego, but cannot be shared by unequal 'citizens'. It is on account of this combination of power and freedom that Iqbal has reservations about democracy, although he charges Nietzsche with advocating an aristocratic model. Iqbal is sincere in his charge against Nietzsche because he has a different model in mind—the prophetic model. Nonetheless the relationship between a prophet and the people can only be of command and obedience. Hence Iqbal's insistence on obedience having a moral value: 'Shun the democratic way, surrender yourself to a mature person, since from a hundred donkeys, one human thought does not emerge'.⁹

Had this been a stray instance, it could have been ignored. But since it is a recurrent theme, it has to be regarded as a dominant passion of Iqbal, a passion for power that creates the pathos of 'obedience', an ecstatic joy in surrendering one's own freedom without coercion. This ecstatic joy produces the 'politics of ecstasy', if instead of enjoying it in an inward manner, which is the true function of poetry, it becomes a guide for action also. One speaks of Iqbal and Sri Aurobindo as cures for the contemporary dehumanization in society caused by a scientific culture. But what should not be forgotten is that the anxiety over this phenomenon of a dehumanized culture might produce some sort of neo-primitivism, which instead of humanizing our behaviour may make it more irrational, hence ecstatic, giving rise to a 'culture of ecstasy'. The danger is there. It vindicates the Qur'anic maxim that poets are not to be followed, for they might take us to

hell. Not only good intentions, sweet voices also lead to hell. Such voices are to be enjoyed, contemplated, but not to be taken too seriously if they go against common sense.

¹ Martin Buber also made this distinction in his *Paths in Utopia* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958). A utopia is an ideal construct based on clear philosophical notions which serve as guides to purposeful action for social change. ‘Utopic’, on the other hand, indicates a belief in the actual possibility of the creation, or the existence, of a society free from evil, greed and social contradictions. See, Edmund de Kadt, *Catholic Radicals in Brazil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 64. In the case of Iqbal, it refers to the prophetic age in the past and the future resurgence of Islam.

² Muhammad Iqbal, *Stray Reflections: A Notebook of Allama Iqbal*, ed., Javid Iqbal (Lahore: Sheikh Gulam Ali and Sons, 1961); hereafter, *Stray Reflections*.

³ The reference here is to Jamal ud-Din al-Afghani’s discourse in *Javid Nama* (Lahore: Sheikh Gulam Ali and Sons, 1932).

⁴ Iqbal, *Stray Reflections*, p. 92.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934; Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 1994), p. 119.

⁷ Trust was offered to the entire creaturely order, including the heavens and the earth, but was refused by all. Only man (*insan*) accepted the trust.

⁸ Editor’s note: Nadir or Nader Shah (1688–1747), Iranian ruler and conqueror who created an Iranian empire that stretched from the Indus river to the Caucasus mountains.

Ahmed Khan Abdali, or Ahmed Shah Durrani (1722?–72) as he was later known, was the founder and ruler of the state of Afghanistan.

⁹ *Javid Nama*, pp. 140–44.

4



Secularism: Western and Indian

I

A striking difference between western secularism and Indian secularism is the fact that the former has become a fact of life, a result of a long historical process of secularization of modes of life and thought, whereas Indian secularism remains an ideal or a value to be realized, which involves, at the intellectual level a considerable break with the past, and at the political level, a patient and conscious nurturing of institutions which could promote and preserve its spirit. If in the West, secularism is a powerful and decisive force in its culture, in India it has become a forceful ideal which has started gathering around it a cluster of values and attitudes that will determine the future course of events and the direction of history.

If the political decisions of the people have any meaning, then it can be said that the idea, at least its political variant, has taken roots in the minds of Indian people. Secularism has become a passion with sections among them and with certain organized political forces in the country. It can hopefully be called an irreversible decision of the Indian people as a collectivity. A passion does not become a creative and a constructive force, or a useful agent in history, unless it is organized and is able to influence the cognitive and volitional moulds of people. It must generate a system of ideas and a set of values for a mediation between the ideal and the real. That is what happened in the West during the last 500 years of its history.

It will be a partial analysis of the contemporary Indian situation if it is urged that the Indian decision is concerned only with the political aspect of the concept of secularism, namely to divorce politics from religion—the principle of Church-State separation in the western context. Two other components of the situation are the passions for democracy and for

socialism, which mark a complete change in the psychic make-up of the Indian people. Speaking in the Indian traditional context, it implies that the passion to establish a 'dharmic' society, in which the emphasis must be on action, motivated by a consciousness of duty prescribed by 'dharma', has been—at least unconsciously—abandoned and is replaced by an opposite passion for establishing a kingdom of rights which will be guided more by instrumental values than by static eternal values. The coalescence of the three ideals—secularism, socialism and democracy—has made the Indian situation dynamic. It will not be possible to check, by a mere effort of will, the flowing-over of the consequences of the actualization of the three ideals into one another. In other words, it will not be possible to restrict secularism to only one aspect, i.e., separation of politics from religion, and to avoid the total consequences of secularization.

If ideas operated only inside the human head it might be possible to resist the dynamics of their movement, but when the stage is actual human history, it is not possible to taste the apple without committing the sin. The only thing possible is to control the consequences of the 'sin', which is implied in the idea of planning. In the Indian context, it means that changes, which occurred in the West through the operation of blind and unconscious forces, can be brought about by deliberate and conscious planning and the logic of the movement can be controlled. It is, however, unreasonable to assume that the entire logic of the movement could be easily controlled, human agency being the most unpredictable factor in a historical movement—it is the one important lesson of the aberrations which happened in the course of planning in planned societies of the contemporary epoch.

II

As the focus of the present analysis is conceptual (of course, it does not necessarily mean that ideas are being treated independent of their social and historical context), attention is focused on some concepts which seem to have led to the secularization of the western society and to the dominance of the idea of secularism. It is possible that there is an element of a priorism in isolating a few concepts from the complex ideational framework of western society. This does not mean, however, that there is a total

acceptance of these concepts in the western world; in fact, there had been considerable resistance against them since the beginning of modern times, but the resisters have always accepted the role of 'outsiders', like Pascal, Dostoevsky, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Kafka. Those who decide to live inside the system have been within the consensual framework, with slight variations. So far as this framework is concerned, the division of the western world into the communists and their opponents is not very relevant, as the difference between these two systems is less significant compared to their differences with the premodern world of eastern Asia and western Africa.

Three concepts, which are the outcome of long processes, highlight the transformation of the medieval western society into a complex secularized world. These are:

1. The principle of rationalism and an uncompromising faith in the adequacy of human reason: that it is adequate not only to unravel the mysteries of existence but also to guide man in his historical existence. This principle does not deny the finitude of human reason, but believes that man overcomes this finitude in the course of history in the shape of accumulated knowledge and reason. This idea introduces the element of history in reason, and thus a gap is filled between absolute reason and historical reason. The idea of rationalism in this developed form has a recent origin, but its basis was present in Greek thought. Hence, it is the product of a Renaissance which resulted in the rejection of the ecclesiastical authority as the infallible spokesman of divine reason as expressed through revelation.

Aristotle, with his assumption that reason is immanent in the universe and the human world, started a new secular tradition in western thought. The underlying principles of this new tradition were that the universe is intelligible, that man is rational, that he has a right to seek happiness and that happiness consists of a life led by reason. It has to be pointed out here that Aristotle made an attempt to purge reason of the Platonic-mystic element and identified it with logical intelligence. In the medieval age this mystic element was, however, again introduced into the scope and meaning of reason, due to the influence of the mystic cults.

The Renaissance world view divorced human reason from the spirit, which was a decision of immense consequences, so far as the unimpeded process of secularization was concerned. Reason as a middle term between

the universe and man, once again, became a leading idea of the western world. This led to the development of a scientific spirit, and, when it was allied with the passion to conquer nature, it resulted in the development of technology.

In the age of Enlightenment of the western world, this idea of reason as an agent of change was further developed by Hegel and then, more fully in an uncompromising secular philosophical outlook, by Marx. Hegel's insistence that 'reason terminates in freedom and freedom is the very life of human subject' led to a synthesis of reason and freedom, which found its development in Hegel's political philosophy and is underlined by the notion that freedom and law have their meaning in institutional life. This idea implied that changes in the human situation have their roots in history. This was a very important development as it rejected the medieval 'providential' idea of history, still persisting in the minds of religious communities.

In the philosophical outlook of Marx, this idea was further extended to the point that human consciousness was regarded as an effect of social existence, i.e., the institutional life of man in history. As Marx conceived the human world, along with the non-human world, as a dynamic dialectical process, the above mentioned assumption led to the conclusion that changes in the institutional life precede, logically as well as chronologically, changes in the human psyche. This Hegelian-Marxian idea has become an indissoluble element of the western mind. This view regards conflict and struggle as a mechanism of change, which now in the West mainly means social and technological change.

Not only did this view abolish the providential view of history, it also replaced the divine in man with the idea of man as a Prometheus or Faust. The Promethean-Faustian image of man becomes a characteristic feature of a new secular humanism. As the new society was a scientific-technological one, a new and a critical contradiction arose. Man's technological reason soon surpassed his intelligence to control the forces of technology—particularly in the bourgeois industrial world. This development gave a new dimension to the process of secularization. Supremacy of reason led to the prevalence of technical reason and values were identified with instrumental values. This situation is common to the communist and the non-communist worlds, with the very important difference that total planning in the former reduces the possibility of inner conflicts in society.

The predominance of reason and technical reason fosters a world view in which the religious category is designated a marginal place. In the words of Harvey Cox, 'religion survives secularization, but what remains in the name of religion is no more than a mark of national or ethnic identification, or, an esthetic delight'.¹ In this situation, everything that is demanded or sought has to be justified before reason and any reference to a revealed authority becomes out of tune with the times. In this process, law, politics, economics, education, and culture are all bound to be secularized. The relation between religion and life creates certain tensions. There are three possible sets of relations: (a) subservience of religion to the dominant secular world-outlook—the communist pattern, (b) irrelevance of religion—western capitalism, and (c) religion as a critique of secularization—a possibility in a democratic society which would make religion purely an élitist activity. The last may be the creative function that religion can perform in secularized Indian culture, inviting sensitive souls to look beyond to transcendence, keeping in view the transient nature of all human achievements including the march of civilization.

2. The concept or the principal of autonomy is a second important principle of western secularism. In simple terms, this idea implies the centrality of man, that man is the supreme end of his actions, an idea on which the various divergent forms of western humanism, liberal as well as Marxian, both converge. Like all modern ideas, it too has its origin in the Renaissance world-outlook, and it has undergone transformations in different directions. It has its roots in the Graeco-Roman as well as the Biblical-prophetic vision of man. It was mostly on account of its two mutually opposite sources that the modern liberal humanism suffers a crisis.

The Biblical vision of man finds its radical interpretation in Erich Fromm's radical humanism. He sums up his interpretation of the Biblical vision in these words: 'The answer of the Bible and the later Jewish tradition seems to be: indeed, man is feeble and weak, but he is an open system which can develop up to a point where he is free'.² This concept of autonomy found its first systematic expression in the moral philosophy of Spinoza, who declared that man's morality must be based on his nature which cannot be determined by any antecedent demands of revelation or any authority. This idea, coming at the age of industrial expansion, created a

movement of thought which could not find co-existence with the ecclesiastical authority either congenial or theoretically possible. Reason had already made nature autonomous and a mere intellectual leap was needed to make man morally and politically autonomous.

In the field of morality this Copernican revolution was brought by Kant, and in the field of politics by the British liberal thinkers, Bentham and Mill, which later developed into the secular concept of man in the world-outlook of that great iconoclast in human history, Karl Marx. The idea of man as an autonomous being implied the separation of ethics from church, and now it was developing in the direction of making politics completely independent of any form of religious or sacred activity. Desacralization becomes one of the inevitable consequences of the march of modernity or secularization. Kant, perhaps, did not foresee this possibility of complete desacralization of human culture as an offshoot of the idea of human autonomy, but the idea having been articulated in the best creative epoch of human history, it was inevitable that it take this than any other direction.

The communist world has moved consistently in the direction of working out the implications of the idea of autonomy where religion becomes inconsistent with secularism, and the so-called liberal West tries to accommodate religion through the concept of co-existence. It is, however, clear that in a world in which technological reason is dominant, co-existence of the transcendental view of the origin of reason and the technological one becomes, if not impossible, at least, questionable.

Technological reason makes common sense, or pragmatic reason, the ultimate criterion, and in this atmosphere the man of faith too feels a need to appeal to the practical sense to justify the co-existence of religion and secularism. Just to quote one example from a leading Roman Catholic theologian, Jacques Maritain:

Men possessing quite different, even opposite metaphysical or religious outlooks, can converge, not by virtue of any identity of doctrine, but by virtue of an *analogical similitude* in practical principles, towards the same practical conclusions, and can share in the same practical secular faith, provided that they similarly revere, perhaps for quite diverse reasons, truth and intelligence, human dignity, freedom, brotherly love, and the absolute value of moral good.³

Liberal society permits Maritain to consider the possibility that men of faith and men of secular creed can live in the same world and share each others' experiences, and that seems to be the only positive result of the co-existence view. In the lives of common men and women, at least, co-existence does not seem to make any significant difference, and it is an important fact to be remembered by the societies which strive towards secularization.

3. The third, and the most important from the philosophical point of view, is the concept that time is tangible and real, and the march of history implies an irreversible process. In its most developed form this idea owes its origin to the rise of humanistic philosophies, although some contemporary thinkers, like Paul Tillich⁴ in the West and Muhammad Iqbal⁵ in the Islamic East, believe it to be rooted in the Biblical and Qur'anic world views. The idea of the reality of time also implies the idea of the reality of the world and its evolution in time. The word 'secular' itself has this double reference to time and to the world as opposed to eternity and the monastery. Desacralization, referred to earlier, is a logical consequence of the process of secularization.

It is on the basis of this idea that secularization becomes a process of man's increasing involvement with his earthly life and his concern with his present situation, rather than his preoccupation with his destiny which lies in eternity, beyond the world of time and space, beyond *samsara*. It is opposed to the principle that *moksa* or salvation beyond time has more relevance for man and must become more significant in any life-order. The secular concept of life in this sense reverses the whole life-outlook of man and acquires a rival messianic mission. It even encourages the secularization of religious life itself, the examples of which can be found in western history, in movements like that of the 'Levellers'.⁶

From this angle, secularism demands that the life-order must be organized in a manner such that institutions and ideas are in tune with the demands of time. It does not necessarily mean a complete rejection of the transcendental view of time; it means, rather, a proper adjustment between time and eternity. It is not identical with the so-called epicurean attitude of forgetting tomorrow for the sake of the earthly joys of today: it means an evolutionary attitude which believes in the continuity of time-order. It is also in contrast with the classical Asian mystical outlook, with its disgust

and horror of matter, with its cyclical view of time which makes recurrence possible and with it the glorification of poverty and renunciation of the world.

To sum up, the category of history is made to replace the principle of eternity. Time transcends itself in history but is not swallowed by it as it happens in eternity. The development of religious thought in the contemporary West gives us many such examples showing that it has recognized the force of the process and is adjusting itself to a contemporary outlook. It has to be admitted that religion and religious thought have not become sterile in this process of secularization; on the contrary, the new age has opened up new possibilities for them which were never anticipated when religion was enjoying almost exclusive authority.

III

The development of the idea of secularism has been of a different pattern in India. The idea has not been the product of a process of actual secularization of life, and, second, philosophical development had been on quite different lines. Like other ideas of democracy, socialism and the like, it developed as a response to the actual historic needs of Indian society. It was adopted by the western educated liberals who had imbibed the traditions of rationalism, legal positivism, and the social development of the liberal West. These liberal leaders were quite conscious that on the basis of mere Indian traditions the foundations of a new order could not be laid. Indian society needed a strong critique, and in the scientific-humanistic thought of the West they found such a critique.

It is a significant fact, which is often ignored, that—though the Muslim intellectuals, led by Syed Ahmed Khan, did not agree with their Hindu counterparts so far as politics was concerned—there was complete theoretical agreement between them so far as the dominant ideas of rationalism and a scientific criticism of the past were concerned. If one makes a dispassionate study of the writings of these liberals, both Hindus and Muslims, one finds an echo of the principles mentioned in the earlier part of this study, as the dominant ideas of secular philosophy.

The situation, however, changed with the coming over of the nationalists

on the Indian scene. The Hindu liberals were replaced by extremists like Tilak, B. P. Pal, and Aurobindo, and the Muslim liberals by the young obscurantist Abul Kalam Azad. Rationalism was replaced by religious authority and the 'present' was reduced into the past. There was a complete reversal. Aurobindo declared that Indian nationalism was not, for him, a creed, a religion, or a faith; it was *sanatan dharma* for him and he equated the growth or decline of the Indian nation with it.⁷ Young Azad saw in the fight against the British a revival of the spirit of Islam. Historical study of the past was replaced by a romanticization of history, by a nostalgic yearning for the revival of golden pasts, though they were different things for the leaders of the two communities.

History was, however, moving against the intentions of these revivers, and the great change came with the emergence of Gandhi on the Indian scene. The second phase of Indian secularism begins with Gandhi who represents a radical departure from the classical Indian tradition. Much attention has been focused on the religious elements of Gandhi's politics which, though true, is only partially true. In the theoretical scheme of Gandhi, which has to be carefully gathered from his writings and more from his actual life, the idea of the reality of time and the importance of the present worldly existence is forcefully implied.

Of course, he did not revive the secular tradition of the liberals totally, but he picked up the thread and made the secular process irreversible in Indian life. What happened at the last phase of the development of the movement of secularization in the West, happened in Gandhi's life at its earliest phase, i.e., the emergence of a religious consciousness, referred to in this study, which does not look with disfavour at the life of matter and the needs of human body, but, on the contrary, gives to them a proper and an important position in the life of man. From the point of view of pure economics—the present writer is less than a layman in this subject—the 'charkha' might be called a retrograde step, but it was a symbol of the secularizing process. No more was the repeated chanting of the divine name a holy deed for Gandhi; the spinning wheel had taken its place. It was in a sense the beginning of the desacralization process.

Gandhi started his political life in India by leading a textile workers' strike at Ahmedabad in which the new weapon of 'satyagrah' was used, for

the amelioration of the workers' earthly life, and not for their *moksa*. It is true that he founded ashrams, but they were less concerned with the religious life of man, as this term is understood in the eastern religious tradition. They were more like training centres for social workers. In his last phase, the 'bhangi colony' had become his ashram, which suggests that Gandhi was more interested in secularizing religious life, rather than in 'religionizing' the earthly life of man. Again, his fight for the harijans was not based on a deep study of the Hindu doctrine, he was much more moved by the concept of the rights of man, whatever might be his political consideration in this matter.

To turn one's attention to the theoretical assumptions of Gandhi, one finds a very significant secular element: the supremacy of ethics over spirituality. Spirituality, particularly its Indian variety, is least concerned with ethical principles. Gandhi's insistence on a proper relationship between the ends and the means did not have so much religious significance as his quest for a universalist ethics. The category employed by him is purely ethical and has nothing to do with ritualistic and institutional religion. Gandhi was the greatest anti-mystical religious man of India. The seeds of the ideas of autonomy and the significance of time are present in Gandhi's theoretical outlook.

His passion for communal unity belongs to a different category compared to his contemporary Jinnah of the Lucknow pact. Gandhi based his creed of communal unity on his ethical doctrine of plurality, a direct outcome of applying reason to religion. The truly religious person would look with suspicion at the Gandhian insistence on the equal relevance of all religions as it is contrary to a very important principle of religious consciousness, namely, the principle of finality. Gandhi seems to be more interested in the pragmatic and the practical aspect of the problem of the plurality of religions than in any purely intellectual consideration of the problem. A humanistic ethical doctrine would not be bothered about the problem of the final salvation of man in spiritual terms; it will be more interested in the practical outcome of a religious dogma on actual historical human time and life. This humanistic approach is discernible in Gandhi's approach. When he made an appeal for the complete separation of institutional politics from institutional religion, he appealed more as an ethical person than a mystic, who also eventually agrees for the separation because he thinks that matter

defiles spirit. Gandhi was being led by the idea of autonomy in his practical secular outlook, i.e., the separation of politics from religion.

The main idea of the above analysis is to suggest that Gandhi did not look at secularism and secularization as two unrelated matters. Any serious analysis would emphasize the difference and even the opposition of the respective political idioms of Gandhi and Nehru, and this emphasis definitely proves that Nehru had a better appreciation of the logic of secularism than Gandhi. I do not contest the view that Nehru was more consistent in his attitude towards secularism, but what is being suggested here is that the basic philosophical attitude of Nehru was not fundamentally different from Gandhi's ethical concern. Nehru, while he shared the assumptions of humanistic ethics, also called for the requirement of a scientific culture. In Nehru's political thought and practice the principles of secularism achieve perfect articulation. From Gandhi's 'charkha' to Nehru's 'heavy machine' a long distance is traversed though both are symbols of secularization. Definitely there is much more in common between those two symbols than a mystic's rosary and the charkha. Gandhi paved the way for Nehru's consistent approach to secularism and secularization.

Gandhi brought India from the ocean of eternity to the stands of history, and Nehru made a tremendous effort to bring India to the threshold of the modern age. India is now on the way to modernization—one may also call it westernization, which has not become an irreversible process. The problem which contemporary India faces is spiritual. Can India escape the consequences of the excesses of secularization, whether it is of West European variety or of the communist type? Perhaps, the Gandhian vision can serve as a corrective.

¹ Harvey Cox, *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in a Theological Perspective* (London: SCM Press, 1956), p. 4.

² Erich Fromm, *Ye Shall Be As Gods: A Radical Interpretation of the Old Testament and its Traditions* (New York: Fawcett World, 1969), p. 62.

³ Jacques Maritain, *Man and the State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), p. iii.

⁴ See, especially, the 2nd chapter of his *Theology of Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959).

⁵ Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (London: Oxford University

Press, 1934; Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 1994).

[6](#) Editor's note: Levellers or levelers, the name given by its enemies to the republican and democratic movement since it wished to level men's estates, originated during 1645–46 in England. The levellers held that real sovereignty should be transformed to the House of Commons and that there should be complete equality for everyone before the law.

[7](#) Cited in *The Sources of Indian Tradition*, ed., William Theodore de Bary (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), p. 732.

Some Distinctive Features of Indian Sufism

The aim here is to make a brief study of the distinctive features of Indian Sufism. The application of the adjective Indian does not mean that international and universal aspects of Sufism which, according to Massignon, are its distinctive contributions to Islam, are being ignored. The universal character of the Sufi movement does not lie in its supposedly uniform teachings, but in the manner in which these universal teachings were presented to the different peoples through different languages and cultures, and the manner in which these principles were practised so as to draw different peoples towards them. As Schuon has pointed out, there exists a certain connection between revelation and the ethnic genius which is its vehicle.¹ If the term ‘revelation’ is not used in its more formal sense, an authentic Sufi experience also deserves to be called revelation since it can be described as the constant revelation which mankind receives from God. Such an experience has no value if reality is not revealed through it, and in case reality does not reveal itself, then the experience is no more than an illusion. Perhaps, the authenticity of the experience can be judged by its effects on humanity to which the true Sufi addresses himself. To quote Massignon,

... the social importance of Islamic mysticism comes from its supposed remedial value—the value and effectiveness of their rule of life as a cure for the ills of society—[and] the lasting force of Islamic mysticism lay in the superhuman desire of sacrifice for one’s fellows, in the transcendent ecstasy of the martyr, expressed by al-Hallaj, ‘Forgive them, but do not forgive me.’²

Perhaps, al-Hallaj was a better *mumin* than his critics in his act of

forgiveness, as the Qur'an says: Those who spend (freely)

Whether in prosperity,
Or in adversity;
Who restrain anger,
And pardon (all) men;
For God loves those who do good (iii, 14; Abdullah Yusuf's translation).

It is precisely this supreme sacrifice of the Sufi which redeems the rigorous legalistic and formal aspect of Islam as it has been practised by the 'people of the world' (*ahl al-Zahir*). Islam without its Sufism is a legal code, a theory of the state, and a moral discipline providing divine guidance for those souls who have not attained spiritual maturity. The fact that the legal and political doctrines and practice of Islam (i.e., Islam as an ideology) broke down under the stresses and strains of history does not need to be substantiated by extensive historical research. Even the moral principles enunciated in the Qur'an and practised by the Prophet had lost their relevance in the realm of politics and law, though their essence was preserved by the Sufis in their theory and practice.³ The schools of law (*fiqh*) had a remarkable success in obliterating the distinction between crime and sin. Islam had maintained a delicate balance between the demands of worldly life and the far more essential needs of the spirit by belittling the value of the former in the eyes of the believer, but unfortunately the *fuqaha* were so much absorbed in the secular sphere that the mystically inclined theologian and moralist al-Ghazali had to warn: 'In what way do discussions on divorce and buying and selling prepare the believer for the beyond?'⁴ It is not an accident of history that the growth of Sufism and the consolidation of legal schools occurred in a parallel fashion; this phenomenon does not represent the parallel growth of two independent systems but the actualization of two opposite tendencies inherent in Islam itself. It was an unfortunate event of Islamic history that only the former was called a heresy and the latter assumed the title of orthodoxy. It is, however, a fact that the trans-historical vision of the Prophet, a recurrent theme of the Qur'an, was being preserved by the so-called heresy. This trans-historical vision was being subjected to the demands of a contingent life which had lost its contact with the vision. It is not intended to suggest

that the Shariah or the law does not form part of the Islamic structure: on the contrary, it gives to Islam its distinctive historical shape. But what had been forgotten by the post-prophetic generation of Muslims was of immense value to spiritual life, that the Shariah is intended to provide an environment for a religious life and could not be considered the ultimate end of spirituality.

It is one of the illusions of some of the modernist movements in Islam that the ultimate aim of Islam is to establish the sovereignty of God in political terms. If history is a guide, sooner or later the Islamic world might witness a tension between the outward and the inward spirit of religion. The early age of the Sufi movement represents this tension in its most intense form, a tension which is unparalleled in the history of world religions, on this scale and magnitude. The martyrdom of al-Hallaj had a traumatic effect on the Islamic world. It gave an occasion to orthodoxy to realize that the Sufi experience fulfils deeper needs of religious life and that the might of the temporal authority is not equal to the intensity and the depth of the Sufi experience. It also provided an introspective occasion for the Sufi to revise his attitude towards the Shariah since it represents the ‘space’ of his spiritual experience. Sufism and the Shariah can also be viewed as not mutually exclusive extremes, but as two polar entities representing eternity and time.⁵ Eternity is a blank if it does not establish contact with time and the latter becomes a structureless flux—and hence the terrifying principle of spirit—if it loses touch with eternity. This relationship between *tasawat* as eternity and Shariah as historical time is expressed in the esoteric principle that ‘Sainthood is superior to and has priority over prophecy’ (*al-Vilaya-tu afzalu minal-Nabuwwa*).⁶ The controversy in the Islamic world regarding this doctrine was the result of a confusion, which was itself a product of history, over the Prophet’s saintly aspect, expressed in the famous *hadith*, ‘I have a time with God’ (*li ma’ Allah-i waqtun*). The Prophet in his world-oriented life, when he was grappling with history, was a legislator, *shari’*, but he had his constant gaze on the absolute, on the source of revelation. It is only in the latest historical religion, Sikhism, that the saint, Guru Nanak, has chronological and spiritual priority over its law-giver, the tenth guru, Govind Singh.⁷ The prophetic performance of Guru Govind Singh proves our point that authentic spiritual experience needs an outward environment

and a 'space' of its own to give it a historic uniqueness and to make it a distinct moment of human history. Spirituality loses itself in the distinctionless ocean of eternity if it does not strive to create for itself a distinct environment or space of its own. Whether Sikhism is a syncretic religion is an irrelevant issue; it could only be a pastime for historical researchers. The more important point is that spirituality, to become a force in history, does not merely need a way, *tariqat*, but also a way of life, Shariah.

The distinctive character of Indian Sufism lies in its success in resolving the tension between the polar realities of the inward mystical experience or eternity, and the Shariah or history. Indian Sufism is heir to the martyrdom of al-Hallaj, the sober spirituality of al-Junaid, the ecstatic vision of Bayazid, the orthodoxy-oriented mystical life of al-Ghazali, the illuminationistic gnosis of the Ishraqiyyun, the theophanist monism of Ibn al-'Arabi, and the spiritual flights of Vedantic monism. The influence of Islam on the Bhakti movement has been successfully, though with some exaggeration, traced by the authors on Indian medieval religious life, but the influence of Vedantic thought in particular and Indian spirituality in general on Islam has not been properly examined. It is not a question of tracing the origin of a few terms, like *fana* or *wasl*; it involves a deeper problem.

Indian spirituality was to become a real, and in some cases a challenging, environment for the Indian Sufi, as the Indian people were his real addressees. Shariah, or the legal and ethical discipline, which was described earlier as the environment of Sufism, had become for Indian Sufis their cultural or historical *a priori*, their necessary perspective, and, in a higher sense, their limiting or conditioning factor. By the time Sufism had reached India, it had practically resolved the conflict between the transcendental and the immanentist tendencies, which are not two mutually opposite tendencies, but two necessary modes of religious experience,⁸ in a more or less decisive manner, in the pantheistic direction, which was never a total pantheism. It was of a distinctive character, expressed in the theophanist theosophical terminology of Ibn al-'Arabi and the Ishraqiyya metaphor of light.⁹ Further development of this pantheistic attitude was controlled and inhibited by the limiting factor of the Shariah, and it was precisely in this sense that the Shariah served as a limiting factor for Indian Sufism. A

corollary of this tension is the conflict between the external rituals, the system of observances, and the inward spirit, sincerity (*ikhlas*) or the demands of *haqiqat*. The writings and the utterances of the early Sufis exhibit a heightened level of tension. As it has been pointed out earlier, this tension was resolved by incorporating Shariah in the scheme of Sufism itself.¹⁰ In this regard, a useful comparison can be made between the rebellious attitude of the earlier Sufis, for instance, the poetry of Abu Said Ibn Abu al-Khayr (d. 1049) towards the laws of Shariah and the sober attitude of indifference or due regard to Shariah by the Indian Sufis. They were more interested in assigning to it a proper place rather than rejecting it or ridiculing the *fuqaha*. It had become a settled fact with them that Shariah is a way to *ma'rifa* and not an end in itself. Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti¹¹ notes that the attainment of perfection in observance with the ruling class had made Islam the ideology of this class, and hence the importance of the legal and the political categories of Islam. The Sufis seldom used the term *kafir* for the people of other faiths and when they employed this term it was quite often in a different connotation. Khwaja Banda Nawaz defines *iman* as love of God. Sheikh Farid ud-Din Shakargunj or Ibn al-Farid (d. 1235), through his poetry which is full of pathos and a tragic sense of life, teaches his audience that salvation depends on personal effort and the grace of God and not on belonging to a certain faith.¹² This stress on personal responsibility was contrary to the belief of the scholastic legalist, the *faqih*, one of his jobs being the determination of belief (*iman*) and unbelief (*kufr*). This forgotten lesson of personal responsibility is still relevant in a society which is plural and still wants to remain religious.

The other element of the Sufi ethos, the preference for sight (*nazar*) over speculation (*khavar*), came into direct clash with the world-outlook of the *`ulama* and the *fuqaha*, who thought that communal solidarity, so important for the ruling élite, could only be made possible through the transmission of uniform knowledge, made available at the *madrassa*, *Ijma* or consensus of the learned *`ulama* could not have any relevance in the *khanqah* (monastery) of the Sufi, where everyone is anxious to have sight of, or the direct experience of, reality. This point makes it clear that the Sufi's reconciliation with Shariah was only derived from his sincerity (*ikhlas*) and was not intended to get any concession from the ruling élite.

The metaphysical reason for the continued hostility of the *`ulama* and the *fuqaha* was because of the general Sufi belief that vision, or direct experience of reality, is possible and even desirable in this world and during one's lifetime. The *fuqaha* derived the authority for the argument against the possibility of the direct vision of God from the Qur'anic verse 'eyes cannot perceive Him' (vi, 103), and the Sufis argued on the basis of the Qur'anic verse: 'Whoever expects to meet his Lord, let him work righteousness, and in the worship of his Lord admit no one as partner' (xviii, 110). This means that it is not impossible to have this vision. The *fuqaha* interpreted this verse either in a metaphorical sense or understood it as a possibility on the day of judgement. The Sufi's longing for the vision created a barrier between him and the *faqih*, as the latter considered it a compromise with the transcendence of God. Islamic theology had developed an uncompromising attitude to this problem of transcendence. This longing for vision very soon developed into the desire for a union with God, an idea which could never be appreciated by the theologian. Union is the central point of all the Chishti saints, rather a distinctive feature of this order. The great Chishti saint, Khwaja Banda Nawaz, in one of his writings makes a reference to one of the theologians who denied the possibility of vision in this world, either real or symbolic: 'He has seen people of God who did not live without His vision even for a moment.' One of the reasons for this hostility of the *`ulama* to the doctrine of union might be the ideological character of Islam. As Islam reached a stage of decadence, at least in a political sense, in the Middle East, and as political power shifted towards Turkey, the seat of the Ottoman empire, and towards India, it was in these places that the ideological character of Islam began to become more conspicuous. It is one of the characteristics of ideology that it tends to be exclusive and does not tolerate dissent. The *`ulama* had accepted the institution of the Sultan and the doctrine of his absolute power with the qualification that their own word would be final in the matter of dogma. This division of powers was one of the essential features of medieval Islamic ideology. Sufism, with its doctrine of union and its liberal ethos, was not compatible with this ideological scheme.

The third tension which Indian Sufism had resolved was between asceticism and devotion, one of the features of early Sufism. The ascetic spirit manifested itself not only in the other-worldly spirit of the Sufi, but

also in his indifference to the other world with its heaven and hell. Renunciation of the world (*tark-e duniya*) and renunciation of the otherworld (*uqba*) were constant themes of Sufi literature since its beginning.¹³ The theme of devotion, as against asceticism, was taken up by the 'emanationist' Sufi poets like Rumi and Hafiz. For the Sufi poet it was excess of love and devotion which made him indifferent to the world and even to the hereafter. Both these themes are found among Indian Sufis, not as two different themes, but in a manner which make them complementary. It was a result of this reconciliation that the Indian Sufi, while renouncing the world and living a life of detachment, did not become indifferent to his fellow human beings; his passionate love for God did not make him feel alienated from the creation of God. The greatest sorrow for him was man's alienation from God and he called upon humanity to return to its source of being. In this regard he made a difference between those who had deliberately chosen a style of life which enhances their distance from God and those who are the victims of oppression and tyranny of the former. For the first category he had nothing but indifference, while for the second category of human beings he had abundant love and compassion. His love for God included in its scheme love and charity for mankind. It was in this sense that he transcended the principle of asceticism. This humanistic sentiment of the Indian Sufi was not the abstract humanism of the modern type which rejects the transcendental principle altogether; the source of this sentiment was a deep and passionate love of God, the source of all being. A study of the writings of the earlier Sufis creates an impression that the Sufi's highest concern was his own salvation and that he had lost all hope in the rest of the mankind; and it was precisely in this sense that the earlier Sufis had a strong tendency towards asceticism. The case of the Indian Sufis, and particularly the Chishti Sheikhs, was different. Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti advised his disciple in the following manner:

A sin committed does not harm an individual as much as looking down with contempt upon one's own fellow beings.

Of all the worships, the worship that pleases the Almighty God most is the grant of relief to the humble and the oppressed.

The best way of evading the fire of hell lies in feeding the hungry, providing water to the thirsty, removing the wants of the needy and

befriending the miserable (*Mulfuzat-e Khwaja Gan-e Chist*, Khaliq Ahmed Nizami, ed.).

There are no rituals or ceremonies to be performed in Sufism, nor are there academic dissertations which may be easily acquired by reading, but according to men who are lovers of God and the Sheikhs of *tariqat*, Sufism means scrupulously maintained moral behaviour which one must observe towards all the creatures of God.

In the poetic work of Sheikh Farid, preserved in the *Adi Granth*, the themes of the renunciation of the world and the insignificance of worldly life are dominant, and yet one finds the sentiment of devotion to God so strong that the remedial concern for the misery of man becomes ultimately prominent. Constant remembrance of death in his poetry highlights the tragic sense of life, while love for God creates an element of hope so far as the ultimate destiny of man is concerned. The former represents the theme of renunciation and the latter of love. Renunciation is not an abstract and empty theme, it is meant to remind the seeker that involvement in the world, along with the forgetfulness of God, leads to the fallen state, where man loses his concern for his own ultimate destiny. But what was more important for the Sufi Sheikh was the style of life rather than philosophizing about life and death. *Ikhlās* or sincerity being their cardinal principle, a synthesis of these two elements, renunciation and devotion, had become their mission. Translated into an institution, this synthesis expressed itself in their *khanqah* (monastery), where withdrawal from the world (*u'zlat anil khalq*)—the ascetic principle—and the compassion of the truthful and the sincere—the principle of association with humanity (*suhbet-e-sadiquin*)—were both practised for the ultimate vision, the ideal of divine love.¹⁴ Love had been accepted as a higher ideal even by the theologian, but the important point to be remembered is that absolute love for God could not be compatible with extraneous facts like the desire for paradise and fear of hell, and also with a narrowing of the heart and mind to the extent that people of other faiths are excluded from the scheme of salvation. To this extent the position of the orthodox theologian was untenable, if not logically, at least morally. It does not mean that no distinction can be made between belief and unbelief, but it does mean that these terms are not identified with an acceptance of a more intellectual

system, or an organization of rituals. They must be referred to a belief in a higher order of reality, to which man has to aspire. The greatest contribution of Indian Sufism, so far as its glorious period is concerned—which lasted till the emergence of the counter-Sufi movement, that of Sheikh Ahmed Sirhindi—lies in this fact that they practised *iman* for the sake of God and showed high concern for the moral and the spiritual uplift of man. It is true that Sufism as an institution continued to exist for a longer time and, in a sense, still continues to exist, but it ceased to exist as a moral force the moment its ideals were identified with the ideals of the decadent Islamic theocracy in India. This was the greatest disservice done to the Sufi movement, by the theological ideology of Sirhindi. Indian Sufism is undoubtedly a glorious chapter of Indian Islam, but still it is a chapter, and that too a closed one.

¹ Frithjof Schuon, *Dimensions of Islam* trans., P.N. Townsend (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1970), p. 36.

² Cited by Margaret Smith in *The Sufi Path of Love* (London: Luzec and Co., 1959), p. 20.

³ The fact that ethics as a discipline was introduced into the Islamic world by gnostics (for example, the esoterics, Hukama, the learned people, and the *ahl al-Batin*) and mystic thinkers (like al-Farabi, Ibn Miskawaih, al-Ghazali, Sa`di and Dawani) proves my point.

Editor's note: *ahl al-Batin* or the Batiniya, (especially the Ismailiya) interpret religious texts on the basis of their *batin* (hidden, inner meaning) rather than their *zahir* (literal meaning).

Ibn Miskawaih or Miskawayh (d. 1030), Persian scientist, philosopher and historian, whose scholarly works later became models of Islamic thought. His major works are *Tahzib al-akhlaq* (a moral treatise influenced by the Aristotelian concept of the mean), considered to be one of the best statements of Islamic philosophy, and *Kitab tajarib al-uman wa ta`aqub al-himam*, a seven-volume universal history, translated into English as *The Eclipse of the Abbasid Caliphate* by D.S. Margoliouth.

Sa`di, *nom de plume* of Musharrif ud-Din Muslih ud-Din (d. 1291), is regarded as one of the greatest poets of classical Persian literature. Famous for his *ghazaliyat* (lyrics) and *qasa`id* (odes), his major works are *Bustan* ('The Orchard') and *Gulistan* ('The Rose Garden').

⁴ It is not a strange phenomenon, but rather a consequence, that those modernist movements and their leaders in Islam, particularly in the Indian subcontinent, who preach the doctrine of the unity of religion and politics and attribute it to Islam, are at the same time bitter critics of *tasawwuf*; examples are Maulana Abul A'la Maududi and Gulam Ahmed Parviz in Pakistan and the Jama'at-e Islami

writers in India.

Editor's note: Maulana Abul A'la Maududi or Mawdudi, twentieth century founder of the Jama'at-e Islami, opposed both secular and religious nationalism and argued for the Islamization of society and an Islamic alternative to nationalism.

Gulam Ahmed Parviz (1903–85), liberal modernist and friend of Iqbal. He laid stress on the Qur'an to the exclusion of *hadiths*. He was the editor of the journal *Tulu-e Islam*, which he launched in 1935. From 1953 onwards it was brought out in Pakistan.

⁵ The famous Chishti saint, Khwaja Banda Nawaz, (responding to Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri's (d. 1074) comment: '*Shariah* is that which permits abrogation while *Haqiqat* is that which does not permit abrogation'), writes: 'It is true that abrogation is not possible in *Haqiqat*, it is eternal, unchanging and timeless,' in his (Persian) commentary on *Risala Qushariya* (Gulbarga, n.d.), p. 362.

⁶ As explained by its most authentic spokesman, Ibn al-'Arabi, this doctrine only means that the saintly aspect of the Prophet has priority and is supreme over his own prophetic aspect. It is not a mere semantic discussion, as it involves a complete change of perspective in devotion to the Prophet.

⁷ Editor's note: Guru Govind Singh (1675–1708), the tenth and last of the Gurus in Sikhism, founded the fraternity known as the *khalsa*. He declared the end of the succession of Gurus, and thereafter, religious authority was considered to be vested in the Adi Granth or Granth Sahib, the sacred scripture of Sikhism. Guru Nanak (d. 1539) was the first, and Guru Arjun Dev (1581–1606) the fifth, of the Gurus.

⁸ This paradoxical situation is also to be found in the mystico-religious vision of the Sikh gurus, particularly in the utterances of Guru Nanak and Guru Arjun Dev. It proves the point that this tension is unavoidable whenever the Godhead is taken seriously.

⁹ Among the medieval Indian writers on Sufism, Khwaja Banda Nawaz generally approves of Ibn al-'Arabi's position; he has written a commentary on Ibn al-'Arabi's *Fusus al-Hikam*. Banda Nawaz's near contemporary, the Persian mystic poet, Jami, who influenced the later Indian Sufis, employs the theosophical terminology of Ibn al-'Arabi. The following verse of Jami reminds one of Ibn al-'Arabi's attitude of acceptance of the perceptible reality as belonging to the order of being:

The Sophist is devoid of reason

who says that the world is a mere dream, a passing phase;

Indeed the world is an image, but it

manifests the Reality which is inseparable from it (*Kulliyat-e Jami*, Persian, Delhi: Navalkishore, 1865).

Editor's note: Jami or Maulana Nur ud-Din 'Abd ar-Rahman Ibn Ahmed (d. 1492), Persian scholar hailed as the last great mystical poet of Iran. His important works are *Lava'ih* ('Flashes of Light'), a

clear and precise exposition of the Sufi doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud* (the existential unity of being), and the seven-part compendium entitled *Haft Awrang* ('The Seven Thrones').

¹⁰ Al-Ghazali had completed the reconciliation which became the official attitude of the later *tasawwuf*. In Abul Hasan Syed Ali Hujwiri's (d. 1072) *Kashf al-Mahjub* ('The Unveiling of Secrets')—a very early Persian textbook of Sufism, trans., R.A. Nicholson (Lahore: Islamic Book Foundation, 1976)—we do not find any trace of such tension. It was a near miracle that the Sufi, in spite of these two opposite principles, did not suffer a 'bad conscience'.

¹¹ Editor's note: Chishti or Chishtiya (named for Chisht, the village in which the founder of this order, Abu Ishaq of Syria, settled) is an Islamic Sufi order, the most popular one in the Indian subcontinent. As in Khwaja Moin ud-Din Chishti, the twelfth-century exponent, the Chishtiya stressed *wahdat al-wujud* (unity of being). The Sheikhs of the order (1200–1356) were successful in establishing a very influential centralized network of monasteries in the Indian subcontinent.

¹² Gurbachan Singh Talib, *Baba Sheikh Farid: His Life and Teaching* (Ludhiana: Lyall, 1974).

¹³ Students of Sufi literature are familiar with the famous story of the only woman mystic of Islam, Rabia, who carried a glass of water in one hand and a burning torch in the other so as to destroy both heaven and hell. Ibrahim Ibn Adham, another ascetic mystic of the early ages, is reported to have said that if one wants to befriend God then one must renounce the world and the hereafter, and must not feel inclined towards them, and should empty one's heart and turn one's face towards God (cited from Massignon, *Recueil de Textes Inédits Concernant L'Histoire de la Mystique*, p. 22). Bayazid is reported to have said: Heaven is the prison house of the *arif* as the world is the prison house for the *mumin*. Al-Junaid notes: we have not derived *Tasawwuf* from hearsay but from hunger, renunciation of the world by the act of detachment from the objects of love, by cutting ourselves off from our friends, and by being indifferent to knowledge and ignorance (Massignon, *Recueil de Textes*, p. 51).

Editor's note: Rabia al-Adawaiyah (d. 801) of Basra, was a slave who was released by her master because of her piety.

Ibrahim Ibn or Bin Adham (d. 894), who abandoned ancestral property and became a poor wanderer, is regarded as the founder of the movement of *zuhd* (detachment) or *zahid* (ascetic) after al-Hasan al-Basri (d. 728).

Bayazid al-Bestami (d. 874), is considered to have attained the state of *mushahada* or *shuhud* ('witness'), bestowed only on those Sufis who have passed through the various stages or *maqam*. When asked his age, he remarked that he was only four years old since 'I have been veiled from God by this world for 70 years, but I have seen him during the last four years; the period in which one is veiled does not belong to one's life' (Encyclopaedia Britannica, CD-ROM, 1994–99).

¹⁴ This synthesis is also found in an institutionalized form in the Sikh religion. It is noteworthy that the movement initiated by Syed Muhammad (d. 1505) of Jaunpur, a near contemporary of Guru Nanak, institutionalized the *daira* (circle). Syed Muhammad, who claimed to be the promised Mehdi,

made it obligatory upon all to seek the vision of God, to see him with the ‘eyes of the head’, since, according to him, this seeking is the mark of *iman*. The highest stage of *iman*, according to him, is ‘becoming *la Ilah*’, whereas the lower stage is tasting the *kalima*, and the lowest still is verbal utterance (*la Ilah guftan*, *la Ilah chasidan* and *la Ilah shudan*). He regards it obligatory upon every seeker to withdraw from the world, to seek the company of the ‘true’, to have complete trust in God and to migrate from his place of birth without setting down in one place. The *daira* was meant to be an institution where the entire lifestyle conformed to these ideals. What is important, for the purpose of the present discussion, is that Syed Muhammad changed the entire semantics of Islam. *Iman* and *kufr* do not remain theological terms anymore, they assume existential status.

The Changing Concept of Man in Sufi Literature

Sufism, though a product of Islam, is essentially a post-Islamic phenomenon, not only in a chronological-historical sense, but also in its spirit and in the world-outlook which this spirit generated. It has a paradoxical dialectical relationship with its source, and this paradoxical relation becomes very manifest in Sufi poetry, particularly that which belongs to the early period of the Sufi movement, when it had not yet assumed the character of an ideology, offering a supra-rational justification to the established social order by calling upon all believers to leave the world to the mighty Ceasars of the human world and to become meek observers of the cosmic order. In its early phase, it was more an interiorized protest against a ruling ideology which had made its fundamental principle a transcendent God who can only be known through the medium of law, which, having the coercive power of the State behind it, had to be followed in an unquestioningly literal manner. In this ideological scheme, even the relationship of man with God had become a legal-ideological matter, a part of the Shariah. The Sufis offered a remedial scheme, by taking the man-God relationship out of the legal framework and transforming it into a peculiar intersubjective realm, where the finite human 'I' undertakes the project of seeking out the infinite 'I' within the depths of its own being. In the former scheme, man stands in a perpetual tremble before an unknown God; and in the Sufi scheme he ecstatically starts his voyage to 'see' the reality, to 'know' the one who is at the same time a *mysterium tremendum* (*zu-al-Jalal wa-al-Ikram*) and a *mysterium fascinosum* (*al-Rabb, al-Rahim*). It is on this account that the Sufi model of man cannot be subsumed, at least phenomenologically, under the more universal and, therefore, less exact theological-Islamic model of man. The Sufi poet and the seer, Farid ud-Din Attar, at the beginning of his long poem, 'The Conference of the Birds'

(*Mantaq al-Tair*) speaks about man:

He has a lofty spirit, his body comes from the lower element, clay.
Thus he is the meeting point of the humble clay and the pure spirit.
Since the humble and the high have become partners
Man has become a wonderful mystery.¹

Hafiz, the divine-intoxicated poet calls man ‘the falcon of sovereign renown, the high-nesting bird of lofty gaze’. This theme of man as the meeting point of the lofty and the low, who sets off on a voyage to the higher sphere, is one of the constant themes of Sufi literature. Ibn Sina, known more as a speculative philosopher and a follower of the Aristotelian Neoplatonic school, in one of his most profound mystic moments, reassures man that his destiny is not restricted to merely speculating on the problems of beings; man has a much higher stake in the cosmic order. He has a higher destiny, to pass beyond the ‘name’ to the ‘named’, from the word to the reality. In his famous ‘Ode to the Soul’, man’s destiny is described in thrilling lyrical form:

Why then was she cast down from her high peak
To this dreading depth? God brought her low,
But for a purpose wise, that is concealed
E’en from the keenest mind and liveliest wit,
And if the tangled mesh impede her,
The narrow cage denied her wings to soar
Freely in heaven’s high range, after all
She was a lightning flash that brightly glowed
Momently o’er the tents, and then was hid,
As though its gleam was ever glimpsed below.²

These lines suggestive of the philosopher’s ‘failure of nerves’, yet highlights one important feature of the Sufi model of man, his spiritual ascent. Plato, the philosopher, had felt that the description of the essence of man’s being, his ontology, is not completely exhausted by logical reason. ‘Seeing’ has also a basis in human ontology, but he also warned that this love for seeing demands the most supreme sacrifice. ‘The true philosophers

(the lovers of wisdom) are always occupied in the practice of dying'.³ Even in this highest pursuit, an element of cultural relativism is implied. In the classical age of Indian spirituality, the 'true philosopher' was always occupied in the practice of immortality, as *darsna* was considered the highest pursuit and the doctrine of the stages of life guaranteed freedom to pursue gnosis (*jnana*) at the appointed time. The case was, however, different—and still remains different—in a culture in which legal reason, in the medieval world, and technical reason in the modern world, completely usurp the spiritual quest of man. Sufism, in the classical age of Islam, performed this colossal task of preparing man for death. As Massignon has rightly pointed out,

the social importance of Islamic mysticism comes from its supposed remedial value—the value and effectiveness of their rule of life as a cure for the ills of society—[and] the lasting force of Islamic mysticism lay in the super-human desire of sacrifice for one's fellows, in the transcendent ecstasy of the martyr, expressed by al-Hallaj, 'forgive them, but do not forgive me'.⁴

Al-Hallaj, one of the greatest martyrs of Islam in the cause of human freedom, not only represents an immortal example of the Sufi-man, the gnostic being, but also expresses in a passionate manner the Sufi ideal of man, which became the constant theme of all genuine Sufi literature. The essence of man, which man partakes with God, is love. As Massignon has pointed out in his study of al-Hallaj, the mystery of creation can only be understood if one realizes that the fundamental nature of the divine essence is love, creative love, 'essential desire'.⁵

It is obvious that al-Hallaj is referring to the famous mystical tradition of the Prophet in which Allah speaks thus: 'I was a hidden treasure, I loved to be known and I created the world'. Love (*'ishq*) has a wider and a deeper connotation in the mysticism of al-Hallaj and, perhaps, for the first time acquires the meaning of a cosmic force, a creative urge, denoting a relationship between man, God, and the mediating Platonic demiurge. It is wider than the Platonic eros, and much more dynamic than the Christian concept of compassion.⁶

An expansion of this dynamic love, *`ishq*, results in that mystic experience through which man assimilates divine attributes, and existential dualism gives place to ontological identity. This identity does not, however, result in destroying the personality of the mystic—it makes him more perfect, more sacred, more divine, and makes him a free and living organ. Freedom towards death is the reward which the gnostic being achieves in his lifetime. It was on this account that at the last moment, when he was being executed, al-Hallaj remarked ‘My last prayer in the cause of Love (*`ishq*), the only proper ablution for which is by blood’.⁷

This concept of the gnostic being of al-Hallaj opens up new possibilities in the development of the ideal of man and the ideal-man in Sufi literature. The ideal for man is set as unification (*fana fillah*), through which alone he can get the reward of immortality (*baqa billah*); the ideal man is the perfect man (*al-Insan al-kamil*), the archetype of creation and also the recurrent future of the seeker. The axiological principle of the Sufi becomes the notion that man’s future lies in the quest for eternity. Time is transcended and future is made contemporaneous with eternity. The idea of the perfect man, as the ideal of human evolution, was gradually unfolded in the mystico-philosophical anthropology of Islam. It was latent in the concept of *iman*, first systematically presented by al-Farabi, who combines in himself the contemplative and the intuitive potentialities of the human psyche. It has a deeper cultural significance in the history of Islam, to place a better and spiritually more meaningful ideal of humanity before the contemporary world than the temporal political authority which had ambitions of presenting itself as the spiritual church. It not only saved the civilization of Islam from utter collapse and spiritual impoverishment, but also presented a better and a morally more forceful ideal at that historical moment when it was facing the most terrible ‘failure of nerves’. It provides the poet with an utopian consciousness which, blended with the sad consciousness of the existing moment, enriches the tragic sense of existence without throwing the human being into existential despair which has always had the terrifying possibility of moral and spiritual nihilism, the psychological condition of the Dostoevskyian character Kirilov (in *The Possessed*) or the estranged man of Kafka’s world. A world emptied of love has nothing to offer to the life-weary soul, but the Sufi poet made love his immortal guide, the Khidr,

in the dark night of human existence. Rumi, of all the Sufi poets, felt the acutest dissatisfaction with the existing human situation, a passionate, Dionysian longing for change and a burning desire for the emergence of a higher human reality. The man of his poetic creation is both an annihilator as well as a creator of a new order:

I am sad at Pharaoh and his oppression—I long
for the light that shone in the heart of Moses,
The sage wandered in the town with a candle in his hands
Said he, I am disgusted with
The monsters and the pygmies, I long for Man.
I feel weary of the dull and spiritless
Companions; I long for the brave and the
Courageous Rustum of the fable and the Lion of God.⁸

Rumi designates his ideal man as the man of God, who is a king though in an ordinary attire, he is a treasure though fallen in ruins, he has a direct vision of reality, he is not bothered about law books, he is beyond religion and infidelity; he is, in brief, beyond good and evil.

The last line suggests an interesting parallel not only with Nietzsche, the poet-philosopher of life-force, but also with the Indian ideal of *Jivan mukt*, that rises beyond the normal ethical standards of *dharma*.

One of the lasting contributions of Rumi to the Sufi concept of man is his emphasis on love, not only as the mediating term between man and God, but also as the driving force of the entire cosmic order. The implications hidden in the passion of al-Hallaj for *`ishq* unfold with a force unprecedented in the mystical poetry of the world. The subtle and unconscious Neoplatonic sentiment, the agent of aspirations, is transformed by Rumi into that forceful passion which combines in itself the bipolar forces of Indian cosmology, Shiva and Vishnu, which makes love not only a force but also an archetypal reality.

In the poetic imagination of Attar too, the idea of love as a cosmic force had found a strong expression,⁹ but his lasting contribution to Sufi literature and to the Sufi concept of man is his revolutionary discovery that the destination of man is man. At the end of a tortuous journey the birds in search of the fabulous bird (Seemurgh) realize 'there is neither the leader

nor the led and the journey is over'.¹⁰ Man's quest for God is not a philosophical inquiry after the first principle or the ultimate cause or a scientific investigation regarding the mode or transformation, but a search for the ultimate meaning of life, and it is precisely on this account that the mystic and the poet become co-travellers on the road to eternity. The poetic-mystic imagination of Attar reconstructed the entire universe of meaning by the identification of being and meaning in the process of gnosis, a reconstruction which Hegel also performed in the process of his dialectical speculation. On reading Attar, one feels overwhelmed by an aesthetic abundance, but very soon he is back in the valley of wonder, a regression which is as much painful as the aesthetic ascension was abundantly joyful. In this flight upward, the horizontal dimension of man's being is completely ignored, and on his return to the world he feels a stranger in the complex scheme of historico-social relationships. His preoccupation with the 'art of dying' did not give him a chance to prepare himself for the art of living in adverse situations by making a conscious effort to transform the conditions of life and to affirm his solidarity with the rest of the human world. Attar's man is the Prometheus of the inner world, and the lion of God of Rumi's imagination is a Prometheus of the two worlds, who struggles and strives for the transformation of the total situation of man.

Such moments are, however, rare in Sufi poetry. The only other Sufi poet who had a concern for the total man, one who is not only a bird of eternity, but also has to live on this earth, is Sa'di, a contemporary of Rumi. The uniqueness of Sa'di's vision of man consists of the important fact that he, like Shakespeare, never restricts himself to any one aspect of human existence; rather, his vision encompasses the total human situation. The reader, to his delight, finds him engaged in an endless journey that takes him from heights to depths and back again. This honest concern with the total human situation facilitates the participation of the reader, to whichever age he may belong, in the aesthetic experience of the poet. Man has not yet been integrated with time and with the process of history, but the remarkable achievement of Sa'di was that his vision integrated man with the different levels of his own fate. This integrated man is the sage who is able to maintain his human dignity while passing through all the vicissitudes of time. The ideal of humanism demands that the stages of life

are not spatially divided but are synchronized in the time-scheme of human existence; that requires a colossal effort on the part of man.

The image of the sage, the ideal man of the medieval Sufi poetry, could hardly meet this demand. He loses his spiritual abundance in his downward journey to the earth. We witness this transformation of the sage-ideal when we pass from the poetic world of Sa'di into the beautiful and aesthetically more compact world of Hafiz. If human essence is 'seeing' for Attar, endeavour for Rumi, and personal and social solidarity for Sa'di, it is complete aesthetic surrender for Hafiz. The aesthetic surrender of Hafiz is different from the hedonistic despair of Khayyam.¹¹ Khayyam's world is devoid of meaning and his man does not feel obliged to create any meaning; wine becomes a metaphor for ultimate escape from the quest for meaning. In the poetic metaphor of Hafiz, wine serves a contemplative purpose; it is a means of transcendence. Hafiz lived in those moments of history when historical reason was working through the unreason of man, and it is in such moments that history appears completely alienated from meaning, and it is only because such moments recur in the history of man that such poetry acquires a transcendent value.

At this point of discussion a legitimate question occurs: is it not that the meaning we have discovered in Sufi poetry and the ideal of man we have 'read' into it, a discovery of the twentieth-century reader to whom the scientific method has given analytical tools? The medieval world had its own horizon of experience, a world of meaning peculiar to its age, and it was in this context of meaning that the Sufi experiences were integrated. As Susan K. Langer points out, every society meets a new idea with its own concepts, its own tacit, fundamental way of seeing things; that is to say, with its own question, its peculiar curiosity.¹² The fundamental question for the medieval man was salvation, not freedom, and as he lived in a theocentric age his concern was God, and not man. Life-weary as he was, what struck his imagination was the pantheistic-monistic vision of God, a vision which demands complete submersion of man in the all-pervading divinity. Very soon this vision of the Sufi is transformed into the illusion of the epoch. The oppressed, finding no weapons of criticism at their disposal, accepted the Sufi ideology which, at least, taught them the art of dying. The Sufi of the age of decadence also accepted his new role as an instructor in

the art of dying.

When we shift our attention to the world of Urdu literature, we find that, in most of the cases, *tasawwuf* had become an ideology, a metaphysical a priori of the poet. It is no more a vision, a personal experience, a mode of seeing, or even a dynamic interiorized protest. The few specimens we come across in the early Deccan period seem to have lost all concern with man and his destiny. Quietism becomes the highest ideal for man, the dynamic al-Hallaj concept of *fana* turns into a death wish, the Faustian words of Rumi, 'useless striving is better than sleep', find no echo in the sleepy world of the Urdu poet; instead he quietly waits to see 'what is brought by the revolutions of the heavens'. This change in the vision of man and his destiny owes its reason to the historico-cultural conditions in which Urdu poetry grew. This quietist attitude, far from being the aesthetic surrender of Hafiz, was the surrender of a tired soul which could not find even in beauty the highest value attainable in the short span of human life. It was the surrender of a completely crushed soul which had been left only with the quality of expressing its mood of despair.

The idea that human life is transitory is an essential element of religious consciousness, but its expression in Indo-Muslim Urdu and Persian poetry did not possess this religious strain. On the contrary, it represented an attitude of indifference to the higher values of religious life itself. The attitude of unreason, which this poetry represents, is not to be confused with that philosophical anguish which comes after a long and continuous struggle for meaning when the mystery of existence deepens and reason appears inadequate to solve the riddles of the universe. Even in the stylistic field, the concern with the formal structure has a deeper anthropological significance, concern with meaning goes along with concern for life. Words change their meaning when the historical context changes. The idea that man is a microcosm suggested to the early Sufi a cosmic sympathy, a correlation between the flux and the movement of the cosmic phenomena and the unrest of the human psyche. It meant for him that man along with the universe is engaged in an upward movement, an endeavour of ascent. The Sufi poet of the later age used this concept of microcosm as a narcissistic device to cut off his relationship with the vast expanses of the cosmos. Even the sensitive soul of Mir Taqi Mir¹³ finds no sympathy with

the macrocosm. The renowned Sufi poet of Urdu, Mir Dard,¹⁴ compares life with a flood and complains that it brings the message of death. He feels that,

As long as there is a being we are in a commotion/Like a cage we are caught in kinks and twists.

In this scheme, the essence of man's being is neither seeing (Attar) nor striving (Rumi), neither aesthetic contemplation (Hafiz) nor detached participation (Sa'di). Rather it is awaiting death. The moribund Sufi seeks pleasure in the idea of death as it releases man from the sin of existence.¹⁵ The poet who vigorously protested against the idea of the sinfulness of man in the Urdu tradition was Ghalib, a poet who by ordinary norms of definition cannot be called a Sufi poet, and yet he had that inclusive consciousness without which Sufi poetry is not born.¹⁶ In a forceful expressive form, he presented the idea that the part does not stand in an oppressive relationship with the whole. For the first time in Urdu poetry we get a Spinozian atmosphere, and the individual's rightful existence in the totality of being is asserted. What Spinoza did for Goethe, Ibn al-'Arabi did for Ghalib. Man represents the intersection of the eternal divine and the temporal instant. 'Each drop's heart says, "I'm the ocean",/And we? We are His, what more can be said'.¹⁷ The idea of the intersection of the two dimensions of being attains a wider significance in the mystico-poetic vision of Iqbal, the twentieth-century exponent of the mystic vision of Islam. A crusader, though against *tasawwuf* as an ideology, Iqbal revives the early idea that mysticism means presence (*huzur*). This presence, possessing a dynamic nature, fills the entire order of existence with a dynamic unrest; each instance of existence, thereby joyfully strives to flow beyond itself and arrive at a higher level of existence. The march of time and the process of becoming in time is not a process of decay and ageing, as the great Greek sage Aristotle described it, but it is a process of constant creation and recreation. In Iqbal's mystico-poetic vision, man along with the entire order of existence, appears as incomplete, and even 'God has not completed His carving yet'. He looks at history without tears as the future is open to new possibilities. There is, of course, a divine element in history,

the unforeseen of its process, and yet a self-conscious group, by their act of heroic will, can change even that divine plan. Self-consciousness, for Iqbal, is not a mere intellectual principle; it is the total existential act of a striving human personality. The mystic idea implied in the vision of Ibn al-`Arabi—that it is not only man who is in search of God, but God too has a longing for man—becomes articulate in Iqbal, with a force unprecedented in the mystic vision of man. Last, what makes Iqbal's vision of man contemporary is his insistence that the genuine mystic vision is not only a vital act, it is also an act which revitalizes human consciousness, after the attainment of which the mystic actively participates in the progressive, evolutionary movement of history. His mystico-poetic vision does not only represent an intersection of the timeless with time (to use a phrase of Eliot's), it also expresses the intersection of the horizontal dimension of man's being with its vertical aspiration. The contemporary significance of Iqbal, so far as man's destiny is concerned, lies in this significant point that in Iqbal's poetry and thought, man comes of age without God suffering death.

¹ Farid ud-Din Attar's (Persian) *Mantaq al-Tair* (Bombay: Mohammadi Press, 1248 H, 1869), p. 1.

² Cited from A.J. Arberry, 'Ibn Sina: His Life and Times' in his *Avicenna: Philosopher and Scientist* (London: Luzac and Co. 1952).

³ Plato, *Phaedo*, in *The Dialogues of Plato*, vol. 2, trans., Benjamin Jowett (New York: Random House, 1937), p. 67.

⁴ Cited by Margaret Smith in *The Sufi Path of Love* (London: Luzec and Co., 1959), p. 20.

⁵ Cited by Annemarie Schimmel, 'Mystic Impact of al-Hallaj', in *Iqbal: The Poet-Philosopher of Pakistan*, ed., Hafeez Malik (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), p. 314.

⁶ As Schimmel has suggested, it was al-Hallaj who for the first time in Sufi literature used the term *`ishq*, dynamic love, to express man's relation to God.

⁷ Cited from Farid ud-Din Attar's (Persian) *Tazkirat al-Auliya*, p. 9.

⁸ Jalal ud-Din Rumi's (Persian) *Divan-e Kabir ya Kulliyat-e Shams* (ed., by Badi-uz-Zaman, 1336 H, 1957) (Tehran: Intisharat-e Tehran, 1966).

⁹ Attar, *Mantaq al-Tair*, p. 37.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 64.

¹¹ Editor's note: Omar Khayyam (d. 1131), Persian poet, mathematician and astronomer, renowned during his time for his scientific achievements as well as for his *roba'iyats* (quatrains), each of which are complete poems by themselves originally composed on particular occasions. Some of his

quatrains were strung together to form *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* by Edward Fitzgerald (1859).

[12](#) Susan K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key* (New York: Mentor Books, 1954), p. 4.

[13](#) Editor's note: Muhammad Taqi Mir (1722–1810), Persian and Urdu poet. His works include *Nikat-ush-Shu`ara* (1751), the autobiographical *Zikr-e Mir* (1756) and ghazals as well as *masnavis*.

[14](#) Editor's note: Khwaja Mir Dard (1719–85), Urdu poet known for his mystical as well as erotic poetry. His works include *Nala-e Dard*, *Ilm-ul Kitab*, musical compositions in *khayal*, *thumri* and *dhrupad*. He is also famous for the musical soirées, *mushaire*, that he held which drew the most renowned poets of the time.

[15](#) Reference to the supposedly prophetic 'Thy existence is sin' which was of doctrinal importance to some Sufis.

[16](#) Reference to the incident reported by Hali in *Yadgar-e Ghalib*. Hali had once had the occasion to mention the famous Sufi statement 'Thy existence is pain' in front of Ghalib. Ghalib countered, see, Wazir Hassan Abidi, ed., *Ghazaliyat-e Ghalib-Farisi*, (Lahore: Punjab University, 1969), p. 258, with the following couplet: 'They are ignorant who say "Your existence is a sin"/How dare they call a gift of God our sin'.

Editor's note: Altaf Hussain Hali (1837–1914), well-known thinker and poet, also famous for his *Yadgar-e Ghalib* (1897), a biography of Ghalib. His other works are *Musadas-e Hali* (1879), *Shaikva-e Hind* (1887) and *Hayat-e Javid* (1901). His *Munajat-e Beva* (1886) and *Chup ki Dad* (1905) deal with the condition of Muslim women in India.

[17](#) Abdul Rahman Bijnoori, ed., *Divan-e Ghalib* (Agra: Nisqae Hamidia, 1931), p. 45.

Islam and Fascism

I

Since fascism has become a term of political polemics, it is rather difficult to use it in a precise manner. It has become more difficult because it also arouses the horrid memories of the second world war, the extermination of the Jews, the killing of intellectuals, the concentration camps, and above all the tyrannical subordination of man to an oppressive State.

It might be suggested here that all the features enumerated above, except the last one, can be called contingent events which do not have a necessary relation to the political philosophy of fascism. This is partly true, as there is no necessary relation between fascism and anti-Semitism, as there have been regimes which were anti-Semitic and yet were not, in the strict sense, fascist. Similarly, there is no necessary relation between concentration camps and fascism, as there can be such systems of government which practise them and the civilized world does not call them fascist. Contemporary history provides certain interesting instances to prove this point. If Jews are killed or removed by a State, that State is called fascist, but if the State controlled by the will of Jewry removes non-Jews from its limits or forcibly exterminates them, it may enjoy the title of a 'social democratic state', and its representatives may find a place in the socialist international.

Even the fact of the suppression of individuals by an organized state has not remained the monopoly of the fascist state. As States are becoming total, if not totalitarian, this seems to be the tendency of almost all 'civilized' States. During the second world war, it was often remarked that one of the features of a fascist state is that man is respected on the basis of his status and not by his inherent virtue or intellectual achievement. This is

no more an exclusive quality of the fascist State; even in emerging democratic societies, status is worshipped and jealously safeguarded by those who enjoy it. One might offer a definition in terms of a 'chosen race' or a 'chosen leader', who by his will, or subjective strength of life-force, assumes leadership of the masses and shapes their destiny.

The former term will make the state of Israel a fascist state, and the latter term would introduce elements of fascism in some of the developing countries of the third world. This does not invalidate the description of the fascist State; it only points to an inherent danger in the political systems of emerging nations. As political terms often elude a strict Aristotelian definition, such a phenomenological description seems to be the only possible, and also a reasonable, point of departure.

These principles of 'chosen race' and a 'chosen leader' who successfully uses whatever 'forces' are available to him explains satisfactorily the intense anti-communist sentiment of the fascist mind, if the word 'mind' can at all be applied in connection with fascism. Incidentally, one may repeat the remark of Bertrand Russell that there is no philosophy of fascism, there is only a psychoanalysis. The doctrine of scientific socialism, as expounded by Marx and Engels, leaves no place for the concepts of 'chosen race' or 'chosen leader'. It is, rather, substituted in their thought by the concepts of 'class' and 'domination by class'. This suggests that the transformation of the actual world, which includes the human world, has always been a class activity, and could never be done by a mythical race or a legendary individual.

This explanation offered by marxist philosophy is a radical departure from all traditional medieval explanations of social change and historical transformation. This suggests that fascism, although a contemporary phenomenon, represents a desperate attempt to return to the medieval age; it is a revolt against modernity and whatever it implies. As Russell humorously remarked, fascism is a symptom of 'neurosis', it is a neurotic man's answer to contemporary reality. Neurosis is no more an innocent term, since it often leads to a psychotic state. Fascism becomes a matter of concern for a healthy normal individual who desires not only his personal health but also seeks a sane society to live in. As a sane man is one who does not fix his eyes on his past, i.e., childhood, to solve his contemporary problems, sane society too does not suffer from an infantile regression.

Freedom from infantile regression is one of the significant marks of sanity.

II

With this perspective in mind, one can raise the question: is there any inherent possibility of fascist actions in Islam or Hinduism? As we are interested here with Islam, we will leave Hinduism alone for the moment. If by Islam is meant ideal Islam as preached, practised, and lived by the Prophet and his immediate companions, the answer is simple enough. The social philosophy and political theory of early Islam do not reveal any tendencies which can be identified as fascistic, in the strict sense of the term. It is primarily because early Islam itself contained radical solutions to the contemporary issues of the day. In this sense, it was not an infantile regression but a march forward.

The Prophet had a strong passion to establish a sane society, not by his extraordinary mystical or esoteric powers, but through an active participation of the men and women who cried for change. Instead of the principle of a chosen leader, he relied more on the efforts of actual human beings, and, instead of empty activism, he insisted on the unity of theory and practice.

The political theory in Islam even in the days when the Khilafat was replaced by monarchy, retained its dislike for an exclusive authoritarian outlook, as is evidenced in the theory of the state by Abu Yusuf, the famous jurist of al-Harun's time.¹ Thus, the utopian element in Islam could survive longer than what the actual conditions permitted. Passion for the transformation of the actual world gave place to a utopic consciousness, which could gradually be turned into a passion for a lost utopia, lost in the mists of history.

In the historical epochs which succeeded the 'glorious' days, the principle of a golden past became the dominating passion of the Muslim community. It still remains a dominant passion of the activist elements in the world of Islam, whether it is the Jama'at-e Islami or the Ikhwan al-Muslimun. The activists are able to get the support and sympathy of normal believers because there is a tacit consensus on the superiority of the golden past over the other epochs of history among almost all believers, which, in a

sense, inclines normal believers, at least slightly, towards ‘abnormality’ because this notion of the inherent superiority of a golden past—a lost utopia—creates, or is at least capable of creating, a tendency of regression.

A corollary of this notion of a golden past is the idea that all the ills of the contemporary world can be cured by a return to this golden past. As this past is not a mere treasure of values, but is looked upon as an ideal, with all its past institutions, this regressive trend tends to become quite pathological. As Islam is not a religion of mere personal salvation, as it also enjoins upon its followers the obligatory necessity of transforming the actual world, which was one of the bright features of this religion, this passion to return to the past does not merely remain a part of the contemplative mind. It, rather, arouses the passionate believer to ‘force’ the past to return; and the ideological return to the past is soon transformed into an activist ideology of the return of the past.

This activist ideology fosters the psychology of ‘strong will’, because it is only by strong will that the past can be revived. The past-oriented will has to declare a war on the present, as the present becomes a great stumbling block for this ideology. The objective world is to be tamed by the subjective desires of the ‘dreamer’. A regressive and a repressive leader has to take the place of the ‘forward-looking prophet’. This type of leader would try to establish his legitimacy through his ‘magical’ ability to revive the past and mould the present according to his strong will. As the great historical task is now to revive the past, what is needed is an unusual power of illumination, an unusual insight; thereby the ‘leader’ demands unconditional obedience.

This backward-looking utopic mind is averse to using any contemporary phrase. To be legitimate, he has to revive the old semantics too. He does not choose the title of a democratic leader, he is not a mere chairman, he is the *amir*, *ulual-amr*, who is entitled to demand absolute obedience (*ita’ah*) along with God and the Prophet, even according to the Book.

III

The two important requisites of the fascist mind are now present: a golden past, a lost utopia, for instance, the Roman Empire for Mussolini, and the

strong-willed leader who demands absolute obedience. Contemporary authoritarian Islamic ideologies share these significant features of a fascist theory. Contemporary European fascism derived its semantics from the nineteenth-century voluntaristic philosophy and the leadership theory from the idealistic philosophies of history; its Islamic variant revives classical and medieval semantics, as it has to present itself as the most violent enemy of all that is western. This anti-westernism makes its appeal stronger to the middle-class intelligentsia, who passionately revolt against western colonialism. The anti-westernism serves as a symbol and the revivalist passion is total; it gives to this passion a colour of total revolt. It is precisely during the revolutionary epoch that this appeal to the past becomes a motive force for a certain section of society demanding change, yet unable to look forward.²

The old semantics have a magical power, though in this magical practice the sacred becomes the profane. The leader revives the sacred word *bai'ah* (buying) to describe the relation between the leader and the led. The led has to surrender his personality to the leader. The revivalist leader forgets that words derive their meaning from the situation, from 'the stream of life'.

The relation between the Prophet and the believer could certainly be unconditional, but the same analogy can become atrocious if a fallible leader claims a similar relationship. Islamic orthodoxy forbids in categorical terms any man's claim to be infallible, and the leader, the *amir*, to attain legitimacy has to keep the orthodox principle intact. He tries to revive the term *ijma`* (consensus) for his purpose; the consensus of the believers on a fallible leader is irrevocable as long as *ijma`* remains operative, and, as leadership is legitimate even on the basis of force (*ghaloba*), consensus can be manipulated, so long as the leader remains alert.

In this process the traditional meaning of the term *jama`at* also undergoes a change; it is no more a loose federation of believers. It acquires an activist meaning; it is an organized collectivity whose purpose is to enforce the law through institutions (*iqamat-e Din*). To present it as a contemporary ideology, the classical institutions are reinterpreted, while its semantics remain intact. Islam as a *din* is against both capitalism and communism. It allows private property while *riba* (strictly speaking usury

but usually understood as ordinary interest) is forbidden, and *zakat* (a tax on hoarded wealth) is more than recommended. In practice, however, this ideological image of Islam turns out to be more anti-communist than anti-capitalist.³

IV

As it has been pointed out earlier, Islam is not merely concerned with the spiritual salvation of men, in the otherworldly sense; it is primarily interested in the transformation of the actual conditions of life. A group which has identified its destiny with the actual process of transformation is bound to have a hostile image of those who resist this change. The unity and solidarity of the *umma*, the agents of transformation, involves the notion of the ‘otherness of the others’. When the agents of change themselves change in the course of history, the nature of the relationship between the *umma* and the non-Muslims is also bound to change. That which once reflected an objective relationship, now becomes a subjective matter, with little relevance to actual human reality.

The fundamentalist, as he actively participates in the illusion that the entire past can be revived, tries to establish the same old relation between human beings. His utopia cannot offer an equal place to the other, and it is the job of the leader and his advisers to decide who the other is. The other is a title which is given by the true and faithful. The other cannot transgress his limits. This concept of the insider and the other creates a mystique of participation, quite different from the notion of participation in a movement of social change. This relationship is governed by the decree of the leader: the non-Muslims and the Ahmadiyahs⁴ cannot enjoy equal rights with true believers. This sort of situation is bound to create a ‘politics of ecstasy’, and if the State happens to possess technological power, gas chambers are the logical outcome.

V

The foregoing discussion points out the inherent possibilities of the emergence of a prototype of fascism in the contemporary Islamic world. In

certain regions they have become a fact, like the Ikhwan in West Asia and, in Pakistan, the Jama'at-e Islami, which has assumed a completely fascist colour. In countries where Muslims are a minority, the activism of such societies is bound to assume a milder form. The real danger lies in activist philosophers emerging in such communities/countries where Muslims are a majority. The fascistic ideology of the minority groups contributes to the fostering of a climate of regression, which may ultimately make ineffective the share of the minority community in the actual task of change and progress. It might even become suicidal, as a neurotic personality may sometimes find solace in complete withdrawal or suicide.

¹ Editor's note: Harun al-Rashid or ar-Rashid (d. 809) was the fifth Caliph (786–809) of the 'Abbasid dynasty which flourished in Baghdad.

² Marx's statement is significant in this regard: 'At the very time when men appear engaged in revolutionizing things and themselves, in bringing about what never was before, at such very epoch of revolutionary crisis do they anxiously conjure up into their service the spirits of the past'. See, Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852) in Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels, *Selected Works*, 13 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969), vol. 1, p. 398.

³ It is not surprising that this fundamentalist ideology which allows private property and strictly forbids interest, even bank interest, gathers among its immediate followers that section of society which can technically be called petit-bourgeois—the self-employed traders, the white-collared employees, the artisans and the students. This section, on account of its religiosity and limited class interests, is already prone to anti-communism. As capitalism appears to be neutral regarding religion—although it makes completely ineffective and irrelevant its entire moral and ethical normative value system—and as communism is presented as basically antithetical to religion, this class which comes under the influence and the organizational structure of the fundamentalist groups becomes the most articulate of anti-communists. By the refusal of this class to participate in the capitalist mode of production, it has withdrawn from the economic process, and this anti-communism serves the interests of capitalism quite effectively.

⁴ Editor's note: Ahmadiya, a modern Islamic sect, founded by Mirza Ghulam Ahmed, is one order among the dervishes. Ahmadiya is the generic name of various Sufi subsects like Qadianis or Quadiyanis, followers of the original movement, Sutuhiya, followers of the Sufi saint Ahmed al-Badawi (d. 1276), Shinnawiya, Kannasiya, Bayyumiya, Sallamiya, Halabiya and Bundariya.

Islam and Democracy

There are three different approaches possible in a discussion of Islam in relation to democracy. One approach would be to treat Islam in the absolute sense, as a revelation from God, which it is, consisting of 'immutable' doctrines, capable of giving eternal guidance to man, a 'knowledge which is always there'. One of the consequences of this approach would be the view that 'history' is affected by revelation; revelation remains totally untouched by history. This view is undoubtedly flattering for a believer but tells him practically nothing when concrete guidance in a complex situation is sought by him. It places the responsibility of error on the believer and does not give any satisfactory explanation as to why history had been, almost always, a deviation from the 'right path'. Another consequence of this view is a total pessimism that man in history is always at a loss, as far as further action is concerned. In relation to this subject, it has to be pointed out, as it is usually done by apologists, that Islam is a complete and perfect 'democracy' and that it is not only in conformity with what is called science but has already anticipated what science discovers in the course of time. The existing situation of the believer has no relevance to the revelation because he did not seek proper guidance from it. The 'aliens' took clues from it and achieved success in this world, although they are doomed so far as the other world is concerned. It is not surprising that this sort of literature is quite popular in the present century, because it gives an 'image' to the believer about his religion during the worst period of the history of his belief. Revelation being symbolic, it is not difficult to sort out verses and passages from the Book which endorse this point of view. The earliest phase of Islamic history, including the prophetic period when a republican atmosphere prevailed, also gives plausibility to this view. The flowering of scientific activity in the second century of Islam confirms the view that

proximity with the message had made the believer exalted both in this world and in the eyes of God.

The second and relatively better approach is to treat Islam as an ethical norm which judges history but remains outside history. It gives importance to the eternal aspect of the revelation at the expense of the facts of time and change. The upholders of this approach would insist that the ultimate aim of revelation is not to give knowledge of facts but of values. The theological writings of Abul Kalam Azad (1888–1958) of the later phase are a good example of this approach, which was in fact initiated in Indian Islam by Syed Ahmed Khan primarily with a view to depoliticizing the Indian Muslims. Muhammad `Abduh also partially adopts this approach insofar as he declares that the Caliphate as an institution is not an essential part of Islamic dogma. With the revival of fundamentalism and the spread of neo-orthodoxy in contemporary Islam, this approach could not gain any ground. Moreover, its complete indifference to history makes it unsuitable for an understanding of a religion like Islam which, on account of its tremendous impact on history, is inseparable from its history.

Compared to the above mentioned approach, the fundamentalists have a view of history, however, distorted and romantic it might be. Their basic assumption is that what happened ‘yesterday’ can also happen today, provided the believers are imbued with a sense of mission and are prepared to act. They do not give to change an ontological status, but in their resistance to change there is explicit desire to change the contemporary course of events. They want to put the clock back, but they know that there is a clock which moves forward if its movement is not interrupted by human effort. They know that there is a future which is different from the present, although their desired ‘future’ is the past of the history of the community, the golden past, which according to the prophetic tradition (*hadith*) was the best of all times. To them Islam is a total ideology, the ideology of the ‘Path of God’ (*hizb al-Allah*) whose aim is to establish the total sovereignty of God on earth, as it is revealed in the Book, which in plain language means the revival by a force of will the golden past. Between the golden past and the present there is the ‘area of darkness’, a reversal to *jahiliya*, and it is the mission of the true believer to intervene in the process of history and to Islamicize it. This fundamentalism was a hidden implication of the first approach. It is no wonder therefore that the

liberal Sheikh of al-Azhar inspired the Salafiya movement of his pupil, Rashid Riza,¹ and the writings of young Azad still inspire the fundamentalists of the Indian subcontinent.

Compared to the naïve theologian and the Islam-as-Value school, the fundamentalists had a better understanding of the 'age'. They know that in an age of 'secular ideologies' backed by science and technology, Islam could assert its 'presence' only as a rival ideology. A very important point, perhaps the most crucial, which they missed was that the secular ideologies of the twentieth century were the products of an existing level of scientific and technological development and of contemporary socio-economic relations. The fundamentalists were not only trying to put the clock back, they were also attempting to put the cart before the horse. They did not realize that the effectiveness of an ideology in contemporary times depends mostly on its ability to understand human needs in the light of forces generated by scientific-technological developments and existing socio-economic relations. It is not mere will which produces effective changes; it is will which has a capacity to control itself in the light of the contemporary forces that produces desirable changes. On account of their naïve voluntarism and their 'provident view of history', the fundamentalists throw the blame for human failure either on the insufficient will exerted by man or on 'divine intention' and sometimes on both. In spite of their intellectual shortcomings, their call for Islam as an 'ideology' contained an element of truth. And the truth was that regardless of whether Islam ought or ought not to be an ideology, Islam in history had been an ideology for different and sometimes opposing social and historical forces.

This brings us to the third possible approach, which is to study Islam not merely as a revelation of divine intention but also as a rationalization of human intentions. In theological terms, it means that divine intention which is revealed to the divinely elected prophet becomes in the course of time a 'human property', and its relation with the divine, its source, is lost. That part of the 'revelation' which deals mostly with the regulations of human relations reveals most clearly the process of revelation becoming in course of time a rationalization of human intentions. And here, course of time is not merely a contingent fact of human situation but an essential element of human existence, a determinant of human consciousness, that alters the

very essence of religion and of pure 'revelation'—remaining intact in the divine will, called the preserved tablet in Islamic theology.

The quest for a correct knowledge of this pure revelation, a direct vision of the preserved tablet, is a noble striving on the part of man, but unfortunately this quest takes him out of the current of history and urges him to withdraw from this mundane world. At the expense of his social existence he learns the great truth that beneath the current of history, All is One. But as this discovery takes him outside the human world, the relevance of religion to the world is lost. It provides salvation to the mystic élite and leaves the lay humanity in a state of slumber and submission to the impersonal divine will in heaven and the worldly powers on earth. Inward religion which avoids an ideological standpoint ultimately transforms itself into an ideology. This has happened to all higher religions of the world, Islam not being an exception. It is also the fate of not only all religions, but also of the various levels of a particular religion to become ideologies in the course of time.

After a very short time, although it was a glorious chapter in the history of mankind, Islam became an ideology of the classes and groups aspiring to take possession of the empire left by the early Caliphs, the Khulafa-e Rashidin. This process not only transformed the early spiritual community into a political state but in course of time made everything and every activity subservient to the logic of political power. It is an exclusive feature of Islamic history that almost all early schismatic differences arose during and out of a political contest, serving as an ideology for the contenders of power. Even the metaphysical and theological schools owe their origin to a contest for political power. In the post-prophetic period Islam got itself divided into official and oppositional groups or parties, with all sides using all the weapons of ideology for their success. So long as the fight was unresolved there was an all-round flowering of culture in the fields of philosophy, theology, literature and science. But the moment the contest for power was resolved in favour of Sunni Islam in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries, Islam became a heritage from the 'past'. It lost its dynamic character and became a closed norm. This closure was already explicit in the stagnation that followed. The situation was more or less unchanged until the middle of the nineteenth century.

Of the three important groups which emerged on the political scene of

Islam at the close of the Khulafa-e Rashidin—the Kharijites, the Shi`ites, and the Sunnites—the Kharijites alone represented a republican and democratic spirit, although theirs was a rather crude and tribal idea of democracy.² They fought against the first rationalization of political power in early Islam, namely, that the Caliphate was a privilege of the Quraish, the dominant tribe of Mecca. Kharijite Islam became the ideology of dissatisfied tribes, the internal proletariat of Islam. However, since they lacked organization, they had to suffer retreat. The contest for power was left to the two authoritarian groups, the Sunnis and the Shi`as, the former believing in the infallibility of the consensus of the community (*ijma` al-umma*) and the latter in the infallibility of the divinely ordained *imam* who alone represented the will of God and his sovereignty on earth. Both spoke in terms of political power, and their respective theologies emanated from the dynamics of power. One believed that the community of the Prophet carried the mark of infallibility and the second, that infallibility could only become the property of the family of the Prophet. In other words, one believed that the 'real' was the 'rational', and the other that the 'rational' always remained hidden behind the 'real'. It is, therefore, not a mere coincidence that philosophy, in the meaning of meta-physics, was developed mostly by the upholders of the *imamat* principle, and law and political theory by the upholders of the community principle.

It is on this account, again, that philosophy in Islam contains elements of esotericism and political theory, strong marks of 'opportunism'. When the conflict was finally resolved in favour of the Sunnis, that is, of the community principle, Shi'a political theory lost all its relevance to the contemporary mundane world and became part of eschatology, waiting for the hidden *imam* to appear at the end of time to establish the sovereignty of God on earth (*hukumat al-Ilahiya*).

A careful study of the development of political theory in Islam reveals its twofold motivation—to justify the existing political situation and to keep alive the link with the golden past, however weak that link might have become in reality. When the Caliphate had become only symbolic and real political power had shifted to the *wazirs* who had by now become Sultans, political theorists were trying, on the one hand, to justify the shift and, on the other, also keep Sultans sub-servient to the Caliphs. A formula was

evolved to legitimize the power of the Sultan by insisting upon his symbolic allegiance to the Caliph. So far as the legitimacy of the Caliph was concerned, it was declared that it could be either obtained through heredity or by election or by nomination. It is significant that these were also the only actual means employed in history. The 'elitist' character of the theory is revealed by the fact that an election need not involve all or a large number of believers. The electors only ought to be 'men of decision' (*ahl al-hall was al-aqd*) and the number of electors could even be one.

The élitism in Islamic thought becomes clear if one notes that its social theory had divided people into the 'chosen' (*khas*) and the common folk (*awam*). Even the celebrated principle of the consensus of the community was soon turned into the consensus of the learned (*`ulama*). The principle of *ijma`*, it is clear, would only be relevant to the past, to what had already happened, and could not foresee future events. This fact gives to this principle an essentially conservative character.

This digression was intended to bring home the fact that Islam in history has served as an ideology for rulers. As authoritarian regimes became a part of Islamic life and remained so till the end of the second world war, the political theory of Islam became anti-democratic and authoritarian in character. With the exception of the Muslim countries of south-east Asia, which had remained far off from the Caliphate scene, the entire Islamic world still appears as a strong base for authoritarian regimes. Islamic thought continues to remain élitist and unaffected by democratic ideas.

It does not, however, mean that Islam will always resist the idea of democracy. As it has been 'justified' for an actual event, it can also serve as a justification for democracy too only if the latter asserts its presence in the Islamic world. The important difference for our contemporary age would be that Islam will not be the ideology of a rising class. Instead, Islamic ideology will adapt itself to an emerging democratic idea, which means that it will have lost its ideological character. It will not give political legitimacy to the emerging democratic regimes, but it might give to the democratic idea a spiritual content and that will be the greatest contribution of Islam to the modern world. There are moments of an Islamic vision which have been repressed by authoritarian regimes in its past history. One such moment of the Islamic vision repressed in history is the idea of the equality of all men and women both in the eyes of God and of law. Medieval Islam could not

provide a soil for the growth of a humanistic tradition in Islam, though it was a hidden possibility in the Qur'anic vision. Such a humanistic tradition can only grow in a democratic soil. But, as has been pointed out, medieval Islam is a great resistant to the growth of democracy. This deadlock can be broken only if believers reject Islam as an ideology, that is, reject the medieval image of Islam and give importance to the vision it contains.

We come back to the approach of Islam-as-Value. This approach could not become effective because it was not backed by a powerful democratic movement that could break the élitist tradition of medieval Islam. Azad failed because he could not relate his vision to his action. A younger generation of Muslims can succeed if they relate this vision to democratic-humanist traditions of the contemporary world. 'Islam as a rival ideology' is, no doubt, a flattering phrase for believers but like all flattering phrases it lacks truth. Islam can only survive as a vision. Believers ought to remember the warning of one of the tragic figures of their early history, the Umayyad prince Umar II (717–20),³ who declared in one of his pathetic moments that 'the prophet came to summon men to the Faith, not to collect taxes'.

¹ Editor's note: Probably, the reference here is to Muhammad `Abduh who was influenced by the educational reformer al-Afghani, who in the nineteenth century, was the primary force in reinstating philosophy and other related studies in the curriculum at al-Azhar University, a chief centre of Islamic learning founded in 970.

(Muhammad) Rashid Riza or Rida (1865–1935), Syrian scholar, who founded the newspaper *al-Manar* in 1898, and helped Muslims formulate an intellectual response to the problem of reconciling their Islamic heritage to the modern world, by attempting an assimilation of traditional Islamic practices into the forms of modern societies. In this venture, he was influenced by al-Afghani and, especially, Muhammad `Abduh. He became the biographer and leading exponent and defender of `Abduh's ideas. See also, Malcolm H. Kerr, *Islamic Reform: The Political and Legal Theories of Muhammad `Abduh and Rashid Rida* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966).

² Editor's note: Kharijites, an early Islamic sect, believed that the leadership of the community, open to all members of the community, should be determined through election and that Muslims had the right to rebel against any unqualified ruler. They set themselves against the legitimist claims to the Caliphate of the tribe of Quraish (among Sunnites) and of 'Ali's descendants (among Shi'ites).

³ Editor's note: Umayyad dynasty is the first great Muslim dynasty (661–750) of the Caliphate, and was succeeded by the `Abbasid dynasty.

Obscurantism and the Indian Situation (with Special Reference to the Indian Muslim Community)

Indian social life as well as politics is caught in a web of obscurantism. The more prominent manifestations of this phenomenon are found among people professing Islam and Hinduism. I will try here to disentangle the philosophical and social roots of obscurantism.

By obscurantism I mean that attitude of mind which resists the spirit of free enquiry and prefers to remain confined within narrow limits of tradition, even when this hampers further growth and development of a personality and inhibits intellectual, interpersonal communication. This attitude engenders mental apathy, opposition to the notion of change and a love for the irrational. It gives rise to the idea that the entire truth has been spoken in one particular moment of past history and that no such novel situation could arise which calls for a new approach fundamentally different from the usual one. This attitude violently resists the notion that further advances in human knowledge may require us to alter our views about the destiny of the universe and mankind. Any advance in human knowledge which directly or indirectly implies a need to revise norms of thought and action is resisted. It is on this account that each historical epoch in which such a need was felt had its own peculiar variety of obscurantism. There was hardly an age which did not witness a conflict between the forces of enlightenment and obscurantism. Human history is a record of the struggle of reason to overcome unreason and to expand the area of scientific and philosophical knowledge. The philosophical dispute of Socrates with his adversaries, for instance, on the question of the status of universals is not merely a chapter in the history of philosophy; it is, in a very important

sense, a part of the history of human civilization. He was trying to lay down the foundations of a secular rational ethics which aimed at making the truly authentic man the end of all human activity. He was, further, making an attempt to raise the status of moral judgement and close the gap between the logical and the ethical. The Socratic method was a reminder that man who is still a prisoner of conventional morality cannot be regarded as a measure of the universe.

An authentic man is not historically conditioned; he is historically situated. The difference between these two notions is of vital importance to the destiny of man in this universe, who is not only bound by physical forces but is also limited by the historical process of which he is a peculiar product. He has to exert all his energies to transcend the present historical situation. This self-transcendence is not a negation of history, neither is it a repudiation of the past; it is an act to elevate the present to the level of a future which is so different from the past and the present that it needs a new name: future. Obscurantism is just another name for an opposite tendency, that of equating the future with the past and the present. Instead of self-transcendence, it encourages self-limitation, and self-limitation is another name for limiting the self to its former position, forgetting that the former position itself was a historically acquired position.

Self-transcendence is never a completed fact, it is a continuous process, each age demanding a transcendence which is unique. It is through these acts of self-transcendence that the individual and the community retain their historic continuity. Continuity in time, which is another name for historic continuity, is qualitatively different from mere continuity, which can be found, for instance, in the continued existence of a piece of inert matter. Continued existence does not involve the notion of progress as there are instances of communities which have continued to exist without any continuous progress.

In moments of crises, individuals and communities, sometimes, forget this fundamental distinction between the two notions. The crisis, when it leads to despair, creates a tendency to romanticize tradition and human groups frantically struggle for the retention of whatever appears as a part of tradition. Human life being unitary, ideas often go beyond their proper field and intrude into other fields with which they are not originally related. It needs a mental culture of a very high order to restrict the spread of an idea

beyond its original field and to bring different and conflicting ideas into an orderly whole. Human community as it is constituted needs reason as well as emotion, tradition as well as innovation, science as well as religion, philosophy as well as mysticism, and art as well as myth. It also needs legislation in accordance with the changing needs of society as well as abiding principles of an ethical nature which enable us to close the gap between means and ends. Recent advances in scientific ethics have not made the sermon on the mount or ethical injunctions of the Qur'an pointless for human existence. The extreme modernist and the obscurantist both miss the point and consequently make the task of human reconstruction more difficult, the modernist by emphasizing change at the expense of identity and the obscurantist by trying to impose in a fanatic manner solutions of a medieval age which have lost their relevance. Both commit a methodological error of a grave nature, the former by treating values as mere changing facts and the latter by confusing values with institutions which embody them. The obscurantist aims, perhaps, unconsciously, at self-limitation while the modernist simply forgets that the future is organically related to the past which cannot be completely erased. The real end, i.e., self-transcendence, is missed by both.

Among developing countries, India presents a critical example of such a conflict between obscurantism and an evolutionary outlook. The reasons are obvious. The primary reason lies in the backwardness of Indian society and India's choice of an open democratic society. If India had chosen the path of dictatorship, this inherent conflict would have been suppressed; India would have become another Spain. India is, perhaps, the only democratic country among developing countries, where different communities have remarkable records of achievements and failures in the past. It is, again, a country where two important world religions and cultures meet, not always in a friendly and cooperative manner but quite often in a confrontation, without any conscious intention to learn from each other and to evolve a common community having a vision of a common future. So long as their traditional perspectives limit them, a common future cannot emerge out of the chaos of history. An immense effort for self-transcendence on the part of both the communities alone could help them to evolve into a common human community.

Very soon, pride assumes the form of arrogance, and it is this arrogant

attitude towards the past that generates an obscurantist mind. What is tragic in India's situation is not a pride in the past but an arrogant attitude, which often becomes anti-historical. Almost all the revivalist moments in India manifest this attitude of an anti-historical arrogance. The situation becomes more tragic when it is remembered that attempts are not being made to revive a common past of all the elements of Indian society but that a section is trying to revive its own sectarian past. Notwithstanding the Indian constitution which confers upon all citizens a common and equal citizenship, such a notion has not yet become an essential element in the cognitive and affective modes of our people. There are still large groups in our society who have not yet learnt to look at man as a primary category in their ethical outlook. It is still widely believed that man derives his real humanity from belonging to a certain religio-cultural group, outside which the concept of humanity has not much relevance. The idea that man ought to belong to a human community which transcends religious or tribal divisions is still an alien idea in Indian society and hence the weakness of the secular idea. Our usual antipathy towards the Marxian idea of class origins is not so much based on our humanistic bias as on our primitive religio-tribal loyalties.

It is not an easy task—at least for a detached observer—to apportion blame to a single factor or community in the present obscurantist situation in our country. Mutual suspicion, a legacy of history, and the present tensions, a result of the rise of pseudo-mystical nationalistic movements and cults having a strong inclination towards fascism, tend to make the promotion of a rational secular outlook on human affairs a formidable task.

Some of the problems of the Indian Muslim community emanate from this situation. There are elements in the Indian situation which foster a tendency in Muslim minds to close themselves into a shell and withdraw partially from the contemporary social reality and consequently deny to themselves opportunities of further growth as a part of the Indian community. Power does not have any lure for them, one of the mainsprings of their activity in the past, which in itself is a very healthy development, but what has replaced this lure for power is a mere search for security. Instead of self-transcendence, self-limitation has become their immediate end, and instead of growth, continued existence as a separate self-contained group has become their objective in their collective life.

Of all the Muslim communities in the world, Indian Muslims are least adjusted to the needs of the contemporary world, and the reason for this lack of adjustment lies partly in their inertia and partly in external challenges which come from the extreme chauvinistic elements of Hindu society which have become remarkably articulate during the last two decades. The continued presence and growth of the latter is the chief obstacle not only in the way of Muslim adjustment but also to the whole process of modernization of the Indian society. The myth of one being the 'ideal community' replaces the search for new models. It is a very interesting phenomenon that the so-called offender and the victim both suffer from the illusion of being the carriers of noble and unique missions. Both communities talk of their separate missions of which they are the sole agents on earth, and in such obscure monologues, that the immediate and much more important goal of contemporary India to transform itself into a modern nation is entirely lost. Both communities are haunted by the images of their golden pasts which are lost in the march of history and which both of them want to rediscover. The tyranny of historical time is such that there cannot be one common golden past for all the inhabitants of this country. A serious question before the builders of Indian destiny is, can the future be sacrificed for a mythical past? It is a pity that modern education has not made any positive contribution towards the eradication of such a romanticization of the past; instead it has further romanticized this idea.

The seeds of the glorification of the past were contained in the movement for independence itself. The leaders of the movement appealed to the separate pasts of their followers to enthuse them to fight against the alien rulers who were also supposed to be the enemies of God at the same time. The early writings of young Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (1888–1958) and the mature Tilak (1856–1920) had similar strains. The movement proved to be more a mystification of the past rather than a preparation for building a new future. As there was a confusion about the end, so there was an arbitrary choice of means. As religion was used to ignite passions against the alien rulers, it was bound to create an atmosphere of religious obscurantism in a society governed by decadent religions.

Religious outlook in itself is not necessarily obscurantist; what makes it obscurantist is the tendency to regard all the past achievements of a religion or a religious community as completely closed and final, and as absolute

guides to all types of activity for all times to come, and the religious method of obtaining truth as the highest method even in those realms of human life which are not pre-eminently religious. It results from letting the authoritarian method of religion intrude into other realms not originally related to the religious. This sort of an authoritarian mind forces the solutions of the past upon the present and gives to the past an authority which is denied to the present or the future.

Such a tendency, as in art also, is not inherent in religion as such. There is an interesting parallel between blind classicism in art and obscurantism in religion or romanticization of the past in the movements of culture. To condemn religion for obscurantist tendencies of a certain religious group at a certain moment of its history would be like rejecting art for the classical tendency of an artistic age. Obscurantism, like classicism, manifests itself in certain periods of cultural decay and in most cases is a symptom of cultural decay rather than the cause of it.

It is difficult to fight obscurantism by attacking its sources; it will be more prudent to combat it by creating new conditions of life which stimulate a quest for new systems of beliefs and attitudes to replace those which have become archaic and obsolete. The present situation in India—so far as Indian Muslims are concerned—is such that it fosters the perpetuation of a medieval outlook. Liberal ideas have never struck roots in Indian soil and whatever minor position they had gained is now imperilled. There is not even a faint realization in articulate sections of the society that the modern world needs patterns of behaviour and new systems of beliefs and attitudes which are compatible with advances in scientific knowledge and the contemporary moral consciousness of humanity. One of the reasons which make our old cultural norms incompatible with the modern scientific world-outlook is their tendency to regard change as a superfluous idea.

The Indian Muslim community shares with other Indian communities a world-outlook which is largely derived from religious traditions developed in a pre-scientific medieval age. The conflict between the two outlooks of two Indian communities is, really speaking, a conflict between two past-oriented outlooks. It is a fact that most sensitive minds among Hindus and Muslims adopt an apologetic attitude towards their respective traditions. Instead of admitting that the present situation needs a fundamentally different sort of solution they had been busy in a futile game of advocating

marginal changes to medieval solutions and instead of re-examining the past, they mercilessly scrutinize the present and try to prove that there is something fundamentally wrong in the present situation itself. The methodological error involved in their scheme is that they make the past the judge for the present and the future. There is nothing wrong in this scheme so far as the metaphysical content of religious traditions is concerned, but it becomes questionable when guidance is needed in matters relating to social affairs and conduct. This type of confusion often occurs in religious communities where religious traditions contain, besides metaphysical vision, an elaborate legal system. Hinduism and Islam belong to this category of religions. It is a normal tendency of an average believer to identify religion with the legal system which is no more than a historical reflection of it.

It is on this account that the problem of legal reform has assumed an importance greater than the equally important problem of theological reconstruction. Most Muslim reformist movements share the error of identifying a particular medieval religious tradition with Islam itself, which as a religion was itself a revolt against the superstitions of the age in which it was born. It is a pity that in the preservation of the Islamic tradition, this revolutionary tradition of early Islam is completely ignored. The Book contained many such passages which should inspire man to open his eyes, use his reason, and conquer the lifeless forces of nature for the enhancement of his position as man. It elevates the status of man as an agent of change in a lifeless universe. It is left to the creative intelligence of the believer to translate the essential vision of the Book into an idiom which suits the requirements of the modern age. The vision is larger than the institutions which it inspired in different periods of history. The essential democratic vision of Islam was partially institutionalized in the medieval age, and its reverence for human reason and respect for human experience was revealed in a limited manner in the magnificent achievements of Muslims in the fields of science, mathematics, and philosophy. Its vision of a universal religion of love is still manifest in Sufi orders, although in a very distorted form. A religion which is obscurantist could never have released the energies of its believers within such a short span of time. It was an error of medievalists that the seal of finality was imposed on its historical achievements.

It was, again, a case of an idea going beyond its proper field and becoming a limit for the further progress of the community. The legal and political institutions of an age are a reflection of its moral consciousness, and it is doubtful if moral consciousness can be regarded as an absolute category without sacrificing the notion of moral progress which is also empirically verifiable. There is always a gap between the higher metaphysical and ethical visions of a religion and the actual moral notions derived from it in different historical periods. The history of Christianity since the beginning of the modern age offers many such examples of the latent potentialities becoming actual whereas Hinduism and Islam, on account of a static life-situation and slow pace of progress, project a tragic picture of stagnation, so far as the development of the moral consciousness of their believers is concerned. In newly independent countries of the Islamic world, the situation is, however, different. Islam is gradually adjusting itself to the contemporary needs of life and is generating systems of beliefs and attitudes which correspond to the requirements of a modern scientific world-outlook.

It appears paradoxical that the democratic environment of India failed to release new forces and to offer new occasions for Indian Islam. The answers offered by critics of Indian Muslims and apologists are both one-sided. The critics charge Muslims with bad faith and the apologists put the entire blame on forces which are avowedly anti-Muslim and anti-Islam. Critics forget that the concept of the Indian nation is a pluralistic one, the different constituents of which will insist on preserving their distinct modes of life till a neutral way of life is born which is based on purely rational norms and a scientific world-outlook. The way of life of the dominant majority is as decadent as the ways of life of the so-called minorities and hence cannot become a norm for a new India.

Behind the present conflict, we find two powerful myths: the myth of a 'national mainstream' and that of a 'cultural identity' of the other group. The myth of a national mainstream is another name for the tyranny of the majority. Similarly, Muslims are not one homogeneous cultural group in the entire country, if culture is not confused with religion. There are still strong grounds to believe that India comprises different cultural groups, the bases of which are not merely religion. The myth of a national mainstream gives strength to the other myths. The upholders of this myth do not remember

that what is called by this name and is supposed to be an existent reality is that hazy image of pre-medieval India which could only be revived in a romantic nostalgic mood. This hazy image is the most formidable source of obscurantism in our country. Similarly, the distinct cultural identity of Muslims has a restricted meaning so far as their distinct religious notions and ethical norms are concerned and beyond that, any mention of a distinct Muslim identity is a myth. The future of Muslims is tied up with the growth of the idea of secularism and the rise of institutions based on this idea. Their resistance to secular legislation in matters of family relations, for instance, is not in tune with the contemporary moral consciousness of modern society. Indian Muslims have to remember that progress involves a readiness to accept risks and the cultivation of a spirit of adventure, but a community whose existence is being questioned by a powerful section of the majority can hardly be expected to take a bold jump into the unknown future. The suspicions of this articulate section of the majority are not merely based on ignorance; there are reasonable grounds to believe that a totalitarian-fascist trend is the source of an antipathy towards Indian Muslims. To think in terms of cultural revival is itself irrational and unscientific, but when the dominant majority talks about it, it becomes a greater threat to the growth of democratic institutions.

The simple opposite of obscurantism is modernization. Modernization, in the true sense of the term is not possible unless a totalitarian attitude towards life is finally given up. Changes in mere external forms of life, without corresponding changes in intellectual attitudes, may result in a greater disaster: a modern technological society with an extreme totalitarian attitude. This is a general problem which Muslims all over the world face today. The situation in India is, however, different. The problem in India is the modernization of the majority of the Hindus who will ultimately determine whether India is going to be a modern state or a state governed by medieval Hindu values. Indian Muslims can accelerate the process of modernization if they accept the suggestion that the values of secular democracy are more in tune with a higher ethical ideal than futile attempts to recapture past politico-legal traditions which are neither in tune with modern times nor can be shared by their contemporaries belonging to different faiths. Indian society can only be modernized on the basis of a value system which can be shared by all its members, and such a value

system can emanate from the humanistic tradition of the contemporary world alone.^{[1](#)}

^{[1](#)} Editor's note: Since these essays were written over a period of time, certain quotations as well as arguments are sometimes repeated. One such example is the concluding passage of this essay that echoes the concluding paragraph of the first essay.

Contemporary Religious Situation: An Existential Analysis

Existentialism as a philosophical movement and as an approach to reality contains certain religious elements which make it different from secular philosophical traditions, notwithstanding Kant's careful analysis of reason, which was based on the principle of the supremacy and total efficacy of the rational faculty. The a priori of this tradition was a more or less total correspondence between reason and being. The subject-object relationship of knowledge also included man in this scheme. The rationalistic method of philosophy and the scientific method both agreed that man is an object of knowledge the same as any other object in the universe.

The bourgeois industrial systems of the nineteenth century made this method their ideological basis, as it made it possible to control the human factor in industry along with other non-human factors. This bourgeois system very soon gave rise to a gradual alienation of man from the system itself. The rational control of industry, instead of reducing this process of alienation, accelerated it, the ultimate result of which was the loss of man to himself. Primarily, existentialism arose as a revolt against this civilization which was reducing man into a mere technological object. It was born out of the consciousness of crisis and as the crisis deepened, it resulted in despair.

The Marxian revolt shared this awareness of a crisis but did not move to the limit of despair. As Marxism had its source in a secular rational tradition, which was struggling to supersede the Judaic-Christian foundations of western civilization, this new trend of secular humanism had deep faith in the ability of man to direct his own destiny by controlling his external conditions. Marxism was the continuation of the revival of the

Promethean spirit of the early Renaissance. The Promethean-Faustian image was the self-image of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie. Marxism retained this image while it transferred it to a proletariat who, it was believed, was destined to liberate man from the process of alienation.

The concept of alienation was an essential element of the Judaic religious consciousness which had its variants in Islam and Christianity. Hegel in his philosophy of nature and history started secularizing it, a process that was completed by Marx in his philosophy of history. In a certain sense Marxism is the total secularization of the Judaic world-outlook. Pascal had, perhaps, visualized the impending spiritual crisis of the western civilization when he made a fervent appeal to revive the God of Abraham and Isaac. Pascal's was a lonely voice when he spoke but he was going to become a force with the deepening of the crisis. The seventeenth century gave birth to two powerful voices, Spinoza and Pascal. Spinoza was laying the foundations of a secular culture by boldly criticizing the Biblical religion and struggling to banish final causes from the vocabulary of philosophy. Pascal was laying the foundations of the future existentialist revolt against an impersonal bourgeois order. One of the dominant motives of existentialism was to revive the prophetic and messianic elements of western civilization which the force of reason had suppressed. The God-fearing Kierkegaard was as much disgusted with his contemporary western civilization as the God-denying Nietzsche was.

There is a fundamental difference between the rebellious attitudes of Marx, Nietzsche and Kierkegaard. The rebellion of Marx was partial, whereas the rebellions of Nietzsche and Kierkegaard were total. Marx saw in a mechanical civilization a great promise for the future whereas Nietzsche and Kierkegaard saw in mechanical civilization a great enemy of western civilization, if this process continued unbridled. Marxism gave priority to the principle of social organization which is basically a problem of rational technology. Existentialism, on the other hand, found in the principle of organization itself the ultimate source of alienation. Both were occupied with the problem of the gradual loss of human freedom in the course of history. The Marxian outlook found the reason for this loss in the wrong ordering of human relations which started with the rise of class society that coincides with the beginning of history. Strictly believing in the causal principle and enthusiastically extending it to the human world,

Marxism found it axiomatic that with the banishment of the cause, the effect would automatically vanish. Marxism retained the presupposition of the Renaissance vision of man that he possesses infinite powers and is ultimately destined to replace God. In such a Renaissance vision of man, a question for the future was hidden: is religious experience necessarily connected with a belief in God? Existentialism tried to answer the question of man's loss of freedom by making a reference to the paradoxical nature of man itself which meant that reason does not lie outside man. If Marxism was overwhelmingly impressed by the doctrine of evolution and extended it to the entire life of man in history with a ruthless logic, existentialism found this principle too unsatisfactory to explain the human situation. If Marxism found the paradox only in history, existentialism regarded it an elemental factor in the human situation which meant the 'Kingdom of God' will always lie beyond history, a transcendental principle never to become a fact.

By a ruthless application of this paradox to human history, Marxism transformed an evolutionary principle into a revolutionary doctrine. All revolutionary doctrines share an implicit faith in the capacity of the collective to replace God. The religious principle of the transcendence of God is rejected in favour of its immanence in the collective, it is in this sense too that the revolutionary doctrine is an extension, and not an opposite of the evolutionary principle. All evolutionary philosophies are immanentists. From another angle, revolutionary doctrines are a tragic admission of the inadequacy of the evolutionary principle. Despair is irreconcilable with a faith in the ultimate efficacy of the evolutionary principle. A revolutionary carries an uneasy consciousness within himself as he tries to combine his conscious faith in reason as an immanent principle in the evolutionary process with despair which lies at the unconscious level of his mind.

It means that the nineteenth-century prophets of revolution had already admitted the breakdown of the evolutionary principle, at least in the human world. Revolutionary philosophies are an unconscious admission of human finitude but they try to suppress it by an appeal to the collective effort of the finite individuals. They, however, forget that the sum total of finite individuals does not result in infinite powers being possessed by the collective. Western bourgeoisie of the nineteenth century were caught in a paradoxical situation. The actual course of history was running against a

faith in absolute hope. The revolutionary prophets were desperately attempting to create hope in a hopeless world. In this regard, revolution was the child of the bourgeoisie trying to prove that the world-outlook which he had inherited was not totally wrong. Scientific revolutionaries such as Marx and Engels had admitted that although men create their own history, they create it in given conditions. This admission has an immense philosophical and theological significance. It points to a paradoxical situation in human history, the paradox of freedom and necessity. It also points out the principle of human finitude. It allows for a possibility of a shipwreck. It means that the new God of humanity, i.e., the collective, does not possess absolute powers. It can only operate in given conditions. Mankind can become conscious of the next course of its history but cannot gain consciousness of its total destiny.

In brief, after a short spell of the idea of infinite powers inherent in man, the nineteenth century was gradually becoming conscious of the paradoxical situation of human destiny. Anthropocentric humanism, the culmination of which was Marxian humanism, was realizing that the given is a limiting factor in history. It is an interesting philosophical situation that humanism is limited by its own product, historical determinism. Revolutionary humanism was only an indirect admission of human finitude. There was another direction in which the desperate soul was moving. This was the way of nihilism, the best example of which is found in Dostoevsky's characters. Man conscious and yet dreadful of his finitude, resolves to seek his salvation by an act of self-destruction, and paradoxically wants to be the master of his situation. His character Kirilov in *The Possessed* declares before suicide: 'If God exists, then the whole will is His and I can do nothing. If He doesn't exist, then all will is mine and I must exercise my own will, my free will. ... For three years I've searched for the attribute of my divinity and I've found it—my free will.'¹ Kirilov expresses the genuine paradox of human life which is desire for absolute freedom unrestricted by the brutal fact of finitude.

In Biblical and Qur'anic symbolism, human life swings between two polarities, man's desire and his capacity for absolute choice and the limitations of his own existence. In the Qur'anic language, man who daringly accepts the trust of the entire universe is 'unjust and foolish'.

Different terminologies used in the Bible and Qur'an apart, it shows an almost identical approach to human destiny. In the history of Christianity, theological thought moved between the ideas of original sin (incidentally Indian religious thinkers would call it an error of judgement) and divine grace, while the history of Islamic theological thought was stuck between the polarities of human responsibility and divine omnipotence. If the Roman Catholic Church was trying to create a balance between sin and grace, the Greek Church was impressed by the idea of suffering. In Islam, orthodox Sunni tradition ultimately accepted a deterministic position which favours the idea of divine omnipotence. Shi'a orthodoxy found in the notion of justice a middle term between divine omnipotence and human responsibility. In later Christianity, while Lutheran theology stressed the idea of sin, the Calvinist approach called upon man to seek salvation through work and deeds. In the latter theology, the concept of salvation which is basically otherworldly was transferred into success and the result was the rise of a secular theology. The fundamentalist movement in Islam, while favouring the idea of divine omnipotence, stressed human obligation to perform the duties imposed upon man by God. In a certain sense, fundamentalist movements aimed at the secularization of Islam, although in a partial manner.

In the history of Islam, except for the brief period of the prophetic age, religious thought had constantly experienced an uneasy tension between two extreme conceptions of the wretchedness of human existence and the ideal of perfection which implies freedom. Unfortunately the idea of freedom lost its significance in Islamic thought and the tension was soon resolved in favour of divine omnipotence and the wretchedness of human existence. Popular Sufi literature was also heavily inclined towards the latter idea. This lopsided development was because Islam did not move beyond the Middle Ages and could not experience the challenge of reason, science and anthropocentric humanism. It is astonishing that the world of nature did not appear as a challenge to the Islamic world, notwithstanding Qur'anic verses calling upon man to conquer the forces of nature. Conquest of 'political space' does not create confidence in the powers inherent in man. If the concept of 'striving' meant conquest of new kingdoms for the extrovert, it meant the subjugation of one's own animal nature for the inward Sufi. It is not an exaggeration that the Islamic world still remains at

the theocratic stage. In the theocratic attitude it is hardly possible to realize the significance of human freedom.

The clash between the theocentric and the anthropocentric attitudes played an important role in the philosophical development of the West and was one of the causes of the rise of a new theology. One of the consequences of this clash was also the rise of existential philosophy. For the majority of existentialists, man is the central problem and it is difficult to call them anthropocentric (of the Renaissance type) as their thought tends to move beyond man and towards transcendence. Even those among them who do not have a longing for a principle higher than man admit and emphasize that the ideal of all human endeavours and projects is the attainment of an ideal self in which man finds combined the fullness of being and the fullness of consciousness (Sartre). Though it is an impossible project, yet man, for him, is condemned to seek it.

The 'dead God' still haunts the imagination of the secularized humanity of the twentieth century and in a certain sense this idea seems to determine the quality of human existence. If the unknown God haunted the poetic imagination of Nietzsche, the impossible God haunts Jean-Paul Sartre. Existentialism is essentially a revolt against the anthropocentrism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which had dethroned the God of religion to enthrone man in his place. This abstract man of anthropocentrism eventually gave rise to 'class' and 'race'. The Hebraic prophetic tradition condemned pride without reducing man into an absolute nothing; it reminded him that although finite, he was created in the image of God. In the prophetic vision, man possessed unlimited potentialities on idea presented as a gift from God. The Old Testament declared man to have been made a little lower than angels and having been crowned with glory and honour. He had been granted dominion over the entire universe and the world had been put under his feet. God created man in his own image and the ideal set before him is to be God-like. Qur'anic revelation repeats the Old Testament ideal and declares in clear terms that the entire universe has been made into man's trust. In the Qur'anic symbolism, the angels were asked to prostrate before man and the one who refused out of his pride became the object of divine wrath for eternity. Satan has been declared the eternal enemy of man on account of his pride. Continuing the Biblical tradition, the Qur'an declares that man has been created in the best mould,

but if he decides to rebel against God by his free will, he will be abased to the lowest possible position:

We have indeed created man
In the best of moulds,
Then do we abase him
(To be) the lowest
Of low
Except such as believe
And do righteous deeds:
For they shall have
A reward unfailing (xcv, 4–6).

The Qur'an, like the Bible, repeatedly reminds man of his finitude and the limitations arising out of this existential situation. It is not insignificant that most of the prayers mentioned in the Qur'an are uttered by prophets. One of the shorter verses of the Qur'an revealed soon after the conquest of Mecca, the crowning victory of the prophet of Islam, reminds him that it is not an occasion for self-glory but a moment of returning to God and seeking His grace.

When comes the Help
Of God and Victory,
And thou dost see
The People enter God
In crowds,
Celebrate the praises
Of Thy Lord, and pray
For His forgiveness:
For He is Oft-Returning
(In Grace and Mercy).²

In the story of Moses as described in the Qur'an, it becomes clear that the best form of dialogue between man and God is prayer. The I-Thou relationship implies man's dependence on God which means that man cannot stand by himself. Even the prophets on certain occasions felt despair.

Only a finite being, a free being, is capable of feeling despair.

This insistence of existentialism on the polarities of freedom and finitude connects it with genuine religious traditions and contains in it a theological value. The anthropocentric humanist civilization was founded on the basis of the autonomy of man but very soon the scientific foundations of this civilization undermined the concept of freedom without which the concept of human autonomy becomes an empty concept. Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Jaspers, and Marcel, in spite of their differences, are unanimous on this point that the scientific method is hardly suitable for the study of man. It makes man an object and thus fails to give recognition to the fact of human freedom. It also gives little or no recognition to finitude as a necessary component of the human situation. Continuous technological progress and the extension of human control over hitherto uncontrolled areas of non-human nature generates the notion of unlimited power of man over nature. Besides being a false notion, it creates a situation of human power without freedom which ultimately reduces man into a robot. The rejection of the prophetic vision of man being finite and yet free, which started in the scholastic age, becomes complete in the modern scientific age. There is an internal relation between the revolt of Pascal against the God of the scholastic tradition and the more recent invocation of Marcel. It is not their participation in the Roman Catholic Church but it is their engagement with history that unites them. In the contemporary Islamic world, it is the poetic-philosophic voice of Iqbal which calls upon man to participate in the prophetic vision. The paradox of man being finite and yet free is one of the important themes of Iqbal in his poetry and philosophy. Men like Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Marcel are as much outsiders in their scientific culture and their scholastic theological tradition as Iqbal is an outsider to both the modern as well as his own intellectual theological heritage.

The prophetic vision of man, an important ingredient of the Hebraic world-outlook of which the Islamic outlook is a continuation, was not negativized for the first time by the Promethean image revived in the post-medieval West but was long ago distorted by the organized theological outlook of Christianity and the orthodox theological opinion current in the Islamic world. The theocratic view about man was as much against the prophetic vision as is the recent scientific version born in the post-Renaissance age. If the theocentric image of man was completely divorced

from the idea of freedom and drowned it into the limitless ocean of divine omnipotence, the mystical and pantheistic images totally ignored the finiteness of man and divine otherness and His transcendence. The traditional theological as well as mystical frame of mind resolved the tension born out of the polarities of human existence by negating one of the polarities. Theology makes God an object of thought and reduces man to a mere object of divine creation, making the mistake of forgetting his subjectivity. Mysticism, on the other hand, fails to make a distinction between the two levels of subjectivity, divine and human. The consequences in both cases are disastrous for man as the tension is artificially lowered. Prophetic vision, the basis of all historical religions, tends to heighten the tension caused by the polarity of existence. Prophetic vision is, in this sense, anti-theological and anti-mystical. The relation between man and God is neither that of slave and master nor that of the identity of subject and object, but as Martin Buber and Berdyaev point out in the Judaic and Christian traditions respectively, and Iqbal in the Islamic tradition, it is that of two levels of subjectivity, implying freedom as a middle term. The relation of man and God involves a mystery and all mysteries produce a tension in the human psyche. The Qur'anic description of the prophet's ascension does not disclose the mystery; the metaphors used heighten it.

The prophetic age keeps this mystery at a level that human creativity gets an opportunity to impress itself on contemporary history. As the distance with the prophetic age increases, the tension is resolved either in favour of explaining this mystery in theologico-legal terms, making God a law-giver, or in terms of an incarnation of the divine in man which turns the mystery into a riddle. There is a third possibility also, the mystico-pantheistic explanation, which, in the ultimate analysis, makes God a mere linguistic convention. So long as incarnation is considered a unique event in history, there is no danger to human freedom, but the first and the last alternatives adversely affect the idea of human freedom. Unfortunately the contemporary forms of human organization still carry the burden of the theological age. Man has not regained the freedom which he had lost in the theological age. He cannot regain it by re-organizing the social relations on totalitarian lines nor can he gain it back by mere assertion of human rights in legal terms because the law reduces persons into non-persons. He can

regain it only on an existential-personal level by knowing his freedom and its limit-situation. The true limit does not lie outside man, it is man himself. This means that man can never become God. As the Qur'an declares, man can acquire divine colour. The Judaic and the Islamic revelations were identical on these points. The theological system of Judaism and Islam jealously guarded this principle. Even the extreme monistic systems in Islamic Sufism were reluctant to identify man with God. The grave mistake committed by the Judaic and Islamic theologies was to overemphasize the notion of God as law-giver. It was, perhaps, on this account that the theological system, particularly of Islam, could not give a proper place to the notion of freedom. The notion of human freedom, particularly vis-à-vis God, is illogical.

It is noteworthy that rational and logical systems, whether theological or non-theological, have not been able to do justice to the fact of felt freedom. Theological difficulty arises in reconciling freedom with religious authority. Man is free but he cannot live without authority. This need for authority also arises on account of the other fact of human finitude. Classical Islamic theology identified religious authority with legal authority which eventually resulted in a confusion between religiosity and a ritualistic observance of law. The classical notion that religious law is a legal system which has been revealed for all times leaves little or no scope for human endeavour. As Karl Jaspers has pointed out, the identity of religion and law formalizes the profound idea of law, and dissipates in absurdities of all kinds. It does not mean that the personal authority of the prophet who initiated the law is to be entirely ignored.

The prophetic revelation of law itself was the outcome of a heightened moral and religious consciousness which had reached the fountainhead of eternity and then had turned back to history to transform it. Kierkegaard's profound observation that there is a leap from the ethical to the religious has great significance in the realm of religious truth. True religiosity consists in a leap not only from the ethical to the religious, but the primary leap is from the legal to the ethical. Religiosity demands the illumination of that religious vision which discovers the profound moral imperative behind externalized legal injunctions. It does not mean living outside law. On the contrary, it means getting an access to the source of law.

Religious law is not law in the legal sense, it provides a criterion for legal

life. A legal system implies a legal authority, and identification of religion with law transfers religious authority to the legal authority. If the legal authority happens to be the religious community, as it happened in the case of orthodox Islam, conformity to the community becomes a substitute for religious life.

This problem becomes a challenging one for a student of Islamic theology. The notion of the finality of the revelation combined with the notion of the community embodying the final revelation confers upon the community a status of finality. On account of the absence of the concept of continuous divine guidance in history, the consensus of the community assumes a status similar to the word of God. Religious communities are, after all, associations of finite men who have fixed their gaze towards the transcendental being and there is no reason to believe that the consensus of the community at one moment of historical time will remain valid for all times to come.

Much harm has been done to religion in the past by confusing the religious community with the political. The latter presupposes an authority which I, as an individual, may or may not like to respect. The relation between the ruler and the ruled, even if the ruler represents the consensus of the ruled, is of a contingent nature. The possibility of the breakdown of this relationship is always implied in it. It is on this account that the acceptance of this kind of authority is more or less provisional. The right to revolt is not only 'given', it sometimes becomes an imperative. It is, in brief, a relation between finites. Religious communities, on the other hand, consist of free individuals who have chosen their destiny to strive for truth. They are not related by fear or a desire for security; on the contrary, an aspiration for something higher unites them. The consensus in such a community will be far deeper than that expected in a political community. It is not law that binds them; it is a love for truth and higher values and a preference for a certain 'way' that brings them together. This love for truth and the passion for striving discloses certain facets of the human personality which are more than facts; they are values and the metaphysical bases for religious life. The more fundamental among them can be summed up in the following manner: (a) that man is a subject, (b) that he is finite, (c) that he is free, (d) that he aspires for transcendence, (e) that he has a capacity to rise above the limits of the 'given', (f) that the rising above the particular situation or the

given is never complete, which means, (*g*) that he is an ever-becoming subject, and (*h*) that he has a history which points to an open future. These values have been stressed by the prophetic lives but they have either been suppressed by organized religious institutions or distorted and misinterpreted by the so-called mystic experiences. If organized religious institutions suppress human freedom in the name of impersonal religious authority, the so-called mystic experience creates an abysmal gulf between the different moments of human personality. All human endeavours point to the fact of human finitude aspiring to reach beyond, which never becomes a completed fact. The mystic way gives rise to a false security that it can become a completed fact which leaves unexplained the feeling of incompleteness that haunts man in all his creative activities and which is called 'creatureliness' in religious language. This can be called the most fundamental consensus of the prophetic religions. It is in this sense that the prophetic experience becomes a criterion. The mystic forgets the difference between divine and human freedom and thus makes human freedom unreal. Organized religion, on the other hand, suppresses human freedom in the name of the completed revelation.

The notion of a completed revelation offers the most difficult theological problem for revealed religion, particularly those revealed religions which derive their authority from the spoken word of God, an event that happened in a certain moment of historical time. Besides endowing this moment with a uniqueness and a sacredness, it creates some problems for later history to which the notion of the sacredness of the revealed moment is not relevant, neither do they follow from this notion. Pragmatism being unsuitable for testing religious truth, history cannot be made a proper judge for the claim of finality or completedness of the revelation. It is also true that the notion of finality is an essential element of faith in a certain religious tradition. Belonging to a certain religious tradition, whatever may be the nature of this belongingness, implies that the person subscribes to the idea of divine revelation having become final in that particular religious tradition.

A religious situation gets more complicated because of an additional notion that truth is exclusively possessed by the particular religion. This leads to a totalitarian passion of getting this 'truth' accepted by the whole world. There are, however, certain philosophical difficulties in this notion which theology has to take into account. The infinite, by definition, is

inexhaustible and, therefore, cannot be totally reached by or through a finite medium. Access to divine word at a certain moment of history can hardly be called the total revelation of God to man since a total revelation of God cannot reach completion in a finite duration of time. At this point, a distinction is to be made between the mystic claim of illumination being total at a certain moment of time and revelation through the word being total revelation.

The finality which revealed experience may feel may be like the finality of a work of art rather than the final experience of total truth. Moreover, the revelation experiencing finality is communicated through a finite medium and hence leaves scope for a variety of interpretations and explanations. The inner finality of experience of one who had it as a result of a life of ceaseless striving is, obviously, different from the dogmatic certainty of those who accept it as a final revelation. Later history can only confirm this experience by its own experiences. It means that such a confirmation through a series of experiences will always allow for a variety of expressions that cannot claim the exactness of a legal or scientific communication. It also implies that theological consensus is different from scientific consensus not only in the degree of exactness but also in quality. Similarly consensus in matters of religious law expresses the consensus of a certain historical period and cannot claim the universal validity of an ethical imperative. Insistence on universal validity of the consensus of a community tries to confer on a historical event the status of an ahistorical value which in a future moment in history might lead to a rebellion against the value itself embodying that consensus. Such a view ignores the element of contingency in history, and instead of making man a master of history, becomes an infallible authority for the future, rather than being a guide for future striving.

The term 'religious authority' when used for an institution born in a historical time, whether past or present, is really an idolatrous term because it transfers the final authority of God—the last refuge of the religious man—to a finite institution. Here, an important question of religious value is involved: should religious authority contend for supremacy along with other worldly and historically contingent claims or be an eternally guiding source for human striving towards the beyond. This question has assumed an importance which it never had in the previous history of mankind. There are

at present two sources of authority, science in the field of knowledge and state in the field of social organization. The relation between these two institutions corresponds to that which once existed between religion and politics in the Islamic world, and the Church and the state in the Christian world. Omniscience which was once claimed by the religious authority has now been granted to science and it is assumed that the scientific method of obtaining truth is the only method. This is exactly what the religious authority had once assumed. The theocratic state has been replaced by the technocratic state and sacred society by technological society.

It is not the religious person alone who feels alienated in the modern world; the creative artist and the sensitive writer are also being condemned to the same situation. There is, however, a difference between the situation of an artist and a religious person. As art never had an authority, it has a great survival value. If religion insists on becoming a rival to science and religious authority a rival to political and technological authorities, religion will reduce itself not only to the level of contingent facts but will also lose its survival value. Religion has to fulfil a greater mission and that is to guide man in his contingent life. Religion lost its position in the West because of its totalitarian claims and there is a possibility that it might meet the same fate in developing countries where it still aspires to retain similar totalitarian claims. As Marcel has pointed out, there is a difference between 'problem' and 'mystery'. Science and religion both have to remember this distinction.

'Problem' belongs to science and 'mystery' to religion. Religion is concerned with man's involvement with his destiny and scientific tools of knowledge are too inadequate to meet the challenges of destiny. Science once fought the cause of enlightenment by insisting that the religious approach is not the only approach to reality but there are certain areas of reality which do not need the light of revelation. The present situation demands that religion taken up the cause of enlightenment against the totalitarian demands of science by pointing out that there are certain areas, for instance, the subjective life of man, which are outside the scope of science and need the light of inspiration. Religion once guided man in almost all spheres of life, sacred as well as secular, when man did not have an access to other sources of knowledge. In the past, the empirical was enveloped by the transcendental. Now the situation has changed. Human

imagination is able to make a distinction between these realms. The transcendental and the subjective cannot be reached by empirical methods and the empirical facts do not need the light of revelation. Does it, then, mean that the secular does not need any guidance from the religious? The answer is not so simple. If religion is man's involvement with his destiny or, as Paul Tillich points out, its area is man's ultimate concern, then this neat division of human life into the religious and secular involves a contradiction. Examples from the realm of art may help us to solve the riddle.

Art no longer chooses its themes from the history of religion but so long as it is concerned with human destiny, it remains religious in the ultimate analysis. Religion has to guide man in his secular life by reminding him that the secular leads to the eternal and that the latter pervades the entire life of man. It has to perform the prophetic mission of saving man from pride. It is the most important mission of religion in the modern world as man's continuous success in the field of technology makes him forget his essential finitude. The greatest aid that religion has to offer to man is to remind him that the world is not complete and the act of creation is continuous. The last and the most authentic refuge is God and it is only in this refuge that man can seek his authentic existence. Life is really a useless passion if it is not guided by God. The only alternative to a faith in God, so far, seems to be self-destruction. Man can hardly find a meaningful existence in a world in which God is dead.

Equally true is the statement that life cannot be meaningful in a world in which the idea of God negates the freedom of man. The need is to realize that the prophetic messages contained the eternal and the contingent, i.e., the eternal was presented through the contingent. As divine revelation through word is not forthcoming and as the present human situation is different, at least in its external form, from the situation which was contemporaneous with the prophets, the word of God needs an interpretation which does not totally restrict human freedom. The finality of prophetic revelation as claimed by Islam consisted of revealing the transcendence of God in unequivocal terms and in freeing man from a sense of guilt. Moreover, it called on man to overcome his existential estrangement by seeking refuge in God who is described as the source and the end of man. It was this conviction which made the Prophet a liberator of

mankind. When the Prophet was moving in history, he was moving in the contingent world the essential mark of which is change. The intersection of the eternal and the temporal is never alike in any two moments of history. This quality of intersection gives to each moment a uniqueness of its own. What is eternal in the Prophetic vision and his example is his gaze towards the eternal when he was engaged in history. It is, perhaps, in this sense that one has to follow the Prophet.

¹ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Possessed*, trans., Andrew K. MacAndrew (New York: New American Library-Signet, 1962), pp. 635, 637.

² Abdullah Yusuf Ali's translation, cx, 1–3.

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Some of the essays collected here were published earlier as follows:

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Alam’s other writings include many articles in Urdu and the text of a monograph on the renowned painter *Sayeed Bin Mohammed* (Hyderabad: Andhra Pradesh Lalit Kala Akademi, 1978). His Ph.D. dissertation entitled *The Concept of Time in Western and Islamic Thought, with Special Reference to Iqbal*, with Annemarie Schimmel’s notations, inscribed to Zahiruddin, is with the Iqbal Academy, Hyderabad.

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Index

Abbasid empire, [29](#), [35–36](#)
Abdai, Ahmed Khan, [220–21](#)
`Abduh, Muhammad, [76](#), [78](#), [267](#)
Abdullah, Muhammad bin, [18](#)
Abraham, [196](#), [286](#)
Adab al-Muridin, [169](#)
Adam, [109](#), [172](#)
Adi Granth, [246](#)
`adl, [110](#), [144](#)
Afghani, Jamal ud-Din al-, [19](#), [75–78](#)
Ahmadiya, [265](#)
Ali, Abdullah Yusuf, [29](#), [144](#)
`alim, [28](#)
Allah, attributes and commandments of, [28](#)
ana al-Haq, [173–75](#)
Ansari, M.T., [9](#)
Aquinas, Thomas, [135](#)
`Arabi, Ibn al-, [19](#), [34](#), [38](#), [70–71](#), [81](#), [91](#), [96](#), [114–18](#), [169](#), [174–75](#), [241](#),
[257](#)
Arberry, A.J., [113](#), [176](#), [178](#), [249](#)
Aristotle, [96](#), [127](#), [134–39](#), [145](#), [198](#), [227](#), [257](#)
Aristotelian, [129](#), [134–39](#), [249](#), [260](#)
 scheme, [129](#)
 and time, [134–39](#)
Arnold, T.W., [20](#)
Ash`ari, al-, [19](#), [30](#), [34](#), [46–48](#), [69](#)
Ash`ari doctrine, [34](#), [46–47](#)
Ash`arism, [48](#), [74](#), [120](#)
Ash`arites, [30](#), [34–36](#), [69](#), [76](#), [109–12](#), [116](#), [120–22](#), [191](#), [212](#), [214](#)
 orthodox view on man's nature and destiny, [109–12](#)
Ashoka, [142](#)

asrar-e Khudi, [167](#), [169](#), [184](#), [186](#), [196](#)
Attar, Farid ud-Din, [113](#), [169](#), [179](#), [248](#), [253–54](#), [256](#)
Augustine, [139](#), [191](#)
Aurobindo, Sri, [54](#), [222](#), [223](#)
Avicenna (Ibn Sina), [29–30](#)
Avveroes (Ibn Rushd), [29](#), [31](#)
Azad, Maulana Abul Kalam, [52](#), [233](#), [267–68](#), [272](#), [277](#)
Azhar, al-, [268](#)

bait al-Hikmat, [29](#)
Bakshi, Lalhiji Nur, [170](#)
Bal-e Jibril, [173](#), [199](#), [208](#)
Bang-e Dara, [193](#)
de Bary, William Theodore, [233](#)
Basari, Al-Hasan al-, [30](#)
batiniya, [37](#)
Bayazid, [241](#)
Being and Time, [203](#)
Bentham, [230](#)
Berdyayev, Nicholas, [208](#), [291](#)
Bergson, [132](#), [155–56](#), [158–59](#), [181](#), [210](#), [215](#), [219](#), [221](#)
bhakti movement, [241](#)
Bible, [286](#), [289](#)
Bilgrami, Akeel, [23](#)
Bismarck, [220](#)
Boer, T.J. de, [30](#)
Browne, E.G., [179](#)
Buber, Martin, [84](#), [291](#)
Buddhism, [31](#), [43](#), [99](#), [142](#)
Bultmann, Rudolf Karl, [78–79](#)

Caliphate, [267](#), [270–71](#)
Caliphs, [269–71](#)
Cartesians, [124](#), [203](#)
causality, Al-Ghazal's repudiation of, [119–26](#)
Chishti, Khwaja Moinuddin, [242](#), [246](#)

Christianity, [31](#), [43](#), [51](#), [87](#), [91](#), [100](#), [142](#), [145–46](#), [195–96](#), [280](#), [284](#), [287](#),
[290](#)
civilized state, [259–60](#)
Collins, James, [198](#)
communalism, [17](#)
Communist Party of India (CPI), [12](#)
compassion, christian concept of, [251](#)
Comrades' Association, [10–11](#)
Concept of Time in Western and Islamic Thought with Special Reference to
Iqbal, [12](#)
Constantine, [142](#)
Corbin, Henry, [71](#), [117](#)
Cox, Harvey, [229](#)
Creative Imagination, [117](#)

Dard, Khwaja Mir, [256](#)
Dasein, concept of, [201–7](#)
democracy, and Islam, [266–72](#)
Democritus, [127](#)
Descartes, [191](#)
Devji, Faisal Fatehali, [21–22](#)
Dewey, John, [156](#)
Dilthey, Wilhelm, [66](#)
Dionysian, [178](#), [192](#), [252](#)
Dostoevsky, [227](#), [286](#)
Dostoevskyian, [252](#)

Einsteinian, [214](#)
Eliot, T.S., [161](#), [179](#), [258](#)
Engels, [260](#), [286](#)
Engineer, Asghar Ali, [20](#), [28](#)
eschatology, and history, [45](#)
Eucken, Rudolf, [200](#)
European fascism, [263](#)
existentialism, analysis of religious situation, [10–11](#), [283–98](#)

Fakhry, Majid [69](#), [123](#)
Farabi, al- [19](#), [29](#), [37–38](#), [69](#), [75](#), [112–25](#), [127–34](#), [136–37](#), [251](#)
 meaning of reason in systems of, [127–33](#)
Farid, Ibn al-, [243](#)
Farid, Sheikh, [246](#)
fascism, and Islam, [259–65](#)
fascist state, [259–60](#)
Fatimid empire, [36](#)
Faust, [228](#)
Faustian, [255](#)
Fichte, [200](#)
fiqh, [28](#), [54](#), [103](#), [238](#)
Fromm, Erich, [229](#)
fundamentalists, and Islam, [49–52](#), [57](#)
fuqaha, [239](#), [242–43](#)
Fusus al-Hikam, [38](#), [70](#), [116](#)

Gabriel, [172](#)
Gadamer, Hans-Georg, [67](#)
Gaffar, Qasi Abdul, [11](#)
Gandhi, [21](#), [234–36](#)
Geistreiche, [180](#)
Ghalib, Mirza Asadullah Khan, [180](#), [256–57](#)
Ghazali, al-, [19](#), [30](#), [33](#), [47–48](#), [50](#), [52](#), [69](#), [74](#), [119–26](#), [128](#), [138](#), [155–57](#),
 [190](#), [194](#), [212](#), [214](#), [239](#), [241](#)
 repudiation of causality and, [119–26](#)
Goblet, [172](#)
God, Islamic perspective on, [63–85](#)
Goethe, J.W. von, [180](#), [183](#), [217](#)
Govind Singh, Guru, [240](#)
Gulshan-e Raz, [170–71](#)
Gulshan-e Raz-e Jadid, [170](#), [175](#)

hadith, [28](#), [44](#), [57](#), [114](#), [116](#), [141](#), [143](#), [145](#), [240](#), [267](#)
Hafiz, Muhammad Shams ud-Din, [166–67](#), [178–79](#), [245](#), [249](#), [254–56](#)
Hallaj, al-, [19](#), [91](#), [117](#), [170–75](#), [237–38](#), [240–41](#), [250–52](#), [255](#)

Hallaj, Mansur al-, [71](#)
Hanbal, Ibn, [19](#), [91](#)
Haqiqat al-Muhammadiyah, [38](#)
Hasan, Akhtar, [11](#)
Hayyan, Jabir bin al-, [29](#)
Hazm, Ibn, [19](#), [49](#), [110](#), [125](#)
Hegel, [64](#), [190](#), [192](#), [197–98](#), [206](#), [228](#), [253](#), [284](#)
Hegelian, [196–97](#)
Heidegger, Martin, [26](#), [186–87](#), [194](#), [200–11](#), [216](#), [290](#)
Heinemann, Frederick H., [196](#), [200](#)
hermeneutics, [66–67](#), [72–73](#)
hidaya, [53](#)
hikmat, [45](#)
Hindu nationalism, [22](#)
Hinduism, [31](#), [87](#), [93](#), [99](#), [261](#), [273](#), [279–80](#)
hizb al-Allah, [267](#)
Hocking, William E., [92](#)
Hodges, H.A., [58](#)
Holderlin, [201](#)
Hourani, Albert, [75](#), [76](#), [77](#)
hujjat al-Islam, [34](#)
Hujwiri, Syed Ali, [242](#)
hukumat al-Ilahiya, [271](#)
human problem, Qur’anic approach to, [57–58](#)
human rights, theory of, [51](#)
Hume, [33](#), [119](#), [124–25](#)
Hussain, Abid, [147](#)
Husserl, [202](#)

Iblis, [172](#)
ijma`, [45](#), [48–50](#), [56](#), [58](#), [141](#), [145](#), [147](#), [243](#), [263](#), [271](#)
ijma`al-Umma, [270](#)
ijtihad, [19](#), [21](#), [46](#), [49](#), [54](#), [144](#)
ikhlas, [246](#)
Ikhwan al-Muslimun, [261](#), [264](#)
Ikhwanus Safa, [29](#)

imama, [49](#)

Indian Islami identities, interstices of, [9–27](#)

Indian nationalism, [20](#)

Indian secularism, [17](#), [225–36](#)

Indian sufism, [166–77](#), [179](#), [237–47](#)

features of, [237–47](#)

Iqbal and, [166–76](#)

insan al-kamil, [37–38](#), [114](#), [116](#)

iqamat-e Din institutions, [264](#)

Iqbal, Muhammad, [10](#), [12](#), [19–20](#), [25](#), [33](#), [39](#), [53](#), [55](#), [59](#), [64](#), [79–85](#), [117–18](#), [125](#), [146–47](#), [231](#), [257–58](#), [290–91](#)

existentialist thinkers and, [190–200](#)

Heidegger and, [200](#)

Indian sufism and, [166](#)

Kierkegaard and, [195](#), [211](#)

Nietzsche and, [192–96](#), [211](#)

on human knowledge, [151–65](#)

on time and self, [177–89](#)

poetic philosophy, [212–13](#)

political philosophy of, [212–22](#)

Isaac, [284](#)

`ishq, [21](#), [71](#), [221](#), [250–52](#)

Ishraq, Sheikh al-, [83](#)

Ishraqiyya, [241](#)

Ishraqiyyun, [241](#)

Islam,

application to modern life, [98–105](#)

central concept of, [43–44](#)

characteristics of, [39](#)

contemporary debate on, [63–85](#)

demand of modernization and, [43–62](#)

democracy and, [266–72](#)

destruction of philosophical enquiry in, [119–26](#)

division into Sunnis and Shi`as, [48](#)

esoteric and exoteric aspects of, [45](#)

ethical vision of, [32–33](#)

fascism and, [259–65](#)
fundamentalists, [49–52](#), [268](#), [287](#)
God and, [63–85](#)
history of, [18–19](#), [30–39](#)
ideology of, [143–47](#)
Indian identity, [9–27](#)
intellectual history of, [30–39](#)
inter-religious understanding in, [86–97](#)
jurisprudence and law in, [31–33](#)
man's nature and destiny in, [109–18](#)
meaning of reason in, [127–33](#)
morality and law in, [140–47](#)
obscurantism and, [273–82](#)
perspectives on, [28–39](#)
philosophy of, [28–39](#), [109–18](#), [127–33](#)
social philosophy and political theory of, [261](#), [271](#)
traditionalism, [43–62](#)

Ismaili, [29](#), [37](#)
Ismailiya, [109](#), [115–18](#)

jahiliya, [54](#), [267](#)
jalal, [115](#), [167](#)
jama`at, [263](#)
Jama'at-e Islami, [53–54](#), [261](#), [264](#)
jamal, [115](#), [167](#)
James, William, [160](#)
Jaspers, Karl, [193](#), [207](#), [211](#), [290](#), [292](#)
Javid Nama, [118](#), [167](#), [169](#), [174–75](#), [184](#), [216](#), [221](#)
Jefferson, [209](#)
Jehan dost, [176](#)
jihad, [173](#)
Jili, Abdul Karim al-, [38](#), [114](#)
Jinnah, [20](#), [235](#)
Jivan mukt, [252](#)
jnana, [250](#)
Judaism, [43](#), [140](#), [292](#)

jurisprudence and law, in Islam, [31–33](#)
justice and just society, in Islam, [32](#)

Kafka, [227](#), [252](#)

Kant, [33](#), [119](#), [125](#), [155](#), [191](#), [206](#), [230](#), [283](#)

kasb, [36](#)

kathif, [37](#)

Kerr, Malcom H., [268](#)

khabir, [28](#)

Khadija, [18](#)

khalwat, [172](#)

Khan, Syed Ahmed, [78–79](#), [233](#), [267](#)

Kharijites, [270](#)

Khayr, Abu Said Ibn Abu al-, [242](#)

Khayyam, Omar, [178](#), [254](#)

Khidr, [116](#), [179](#), [252](#)

Khidr-e Rah, [194](#)

Khilafat, [21](#), [261](#)

khudi, [20](#), [169–70](#), [185](#)

Khulafa-e Rashidun, [37](#), [51](#)

Khundmiri, Syed Alam,

critique in, [24](#)

existential philosophy, [12](#), [25–26](#)

Marxist activism, [11](#), [21](#), [24](#), [26](#)

on Al-Ghazali, [33–35](#)

on man's nature and destiny, [36–38](#)

on morality and law in Islam, [31–34](#)

on religion and modernity, [38–39](#)

Platonic idealism, [20–21](#)

Kierkegaard, Soren, [25–26](#), [195–200](#), [208](#), [211](#), [214–15](#), [217–18](#), [227](#), [284](#),
[290](#), [297](#)

Kindi, al-, [19](#), [134](#)

Kirilov, [252](#), [286](#)

Kitab al-Towhid, [29](#)

Lala-e Tur, [167](#)

Langer, Susan K., [255](#)

latif, [37](#)

Leibniz, [83](#), [133](#), [191–92](#)

Lovejoy, [67](#)

Luther, [76](#), [287](#)

Madinat al-Fadulah, *al-*, [75](#), [113](#)

Mahayana, [92](#)

Malabar Uprisings, [19](#), [21](#)

Malebranche, Nicolas, [124](#)

man,

concept in sufi literature, [248–58](#)

nature and destiny, [36–38](#), [109–18](#)

Ash`arite orthodox new, [109–12](#)

early orthodox theological views, [109–12](#)

Mu`tazilites views, [109–12](#)

Neoplatonic philosophic views, [112–15](#)

Sufi-illuminationist views, [115–18](#)

Zahirite views, [109–12](#)

prophetic vision of, [290–291](#)

Qur`anic vision of, [57–59](#)

theocentric image of, [290](#)

theosophic concept of, [71](#)

Mantaq al-Tair, [249](#)

Maqtul, *al-*, [118](#)

Maqtul, Sheikh Shihab ud-Din Suhrawardi, [83](#), [118](#)

Marcel, [65](#), [290](#), [296](#)

Maritain, Jacques, [231](#)

Marquez, [13](#)

Marx, Karl, [11](#), [26](#), [192–93](#), [201](#), [204](#), [209](#), [215–19](#), [228](#), [230](#), [260](#), [284](#), [286](#)

Marxism, [10](#), [26](#), [283](#)

masnavi, [170](#), [184](#), [193](#)

Massignon, [237](#), [250](#)

Mayavad, [175](#)

Mazzini, [220](#)

McTaggart, J.M.E., [177](#)

mehdi, [92](#)
Miftah al-i`jaz fi sharh Gulshan-e Raz, [170](#)
Mill, James, [209](#)
Mir, Mir Taqi, [256](#)
moderate Muslim, [23](#)
modernism, demands of and Islamic traditionalism, [43–62](#)
Mohiuddin, Makhdoom, [11](#)
moksha, [232](#), [234](#)
Moses, [171–72](#), [289](#)
Mosque of Cordova (Masjid-e-Qartubu), [186–87](#), [208](#)
Mughals, [36](#)
Muhammad, Prophet, [43–45](#), [71](#), [91](#), [114](#), [217](#)
Munqidh min ad-dalal, *al-*, [122](#)
murid, [173](#)
muslim in India, [16–17](#), [21–23](#), [273–82](#)
 obscurantism and, [273–82](#)
Muslim League, [20](#)
Mussolini, [263](#)
Mutawakkil, *al-*, [35](#)
Mu`tazilites, [30](#), [35–36](#), [69](#), [76](#), [92](#), [109–12](#), [121](#)
 school in Islamic history, [30](#)
 views on man's nature and destiny, [109](#)

Nadva School (Nadvat al-`Ulama), [52](#)
Nadvat al-`Ulama, [52](#)
Nadvi, Abu'l Hasan `Alian-, [54](#)
Nahj al-Balagha, [29](#)
Nanak, Guru, [240](#)
Nasr, Sayyed Hossein, [97](#), [134](#)
Nawaz, Khwaja Banda, [243–44](#)
Nehru, Jawaharlal, [235–36](#)
neoplatonic, views on man's nature and destiny, [109](#), [112–15](#)
New Testament, [195](#), [197](#)
Nicholson, [151](#)
Nietzsche, Fredrich, [25–26](#), [180](#), [192–96](#), [200](#), [211](#), [215](#), [217–19](#), [221](#), [227](#),
 [252](#), [284](#), [288](#), [290](#)

Northrop, F.S.C., [94](#)
novelty, identification with heresy, [48](#)
nur, [28](#)

obscurantism, Indian situation and, [273–82](#)
occasionalism, doctrine of, [34](#), [37](#), [69](#), [110](#)
Old Testament, [288](#)
orthodox Islam, [33](#)
orthodox Muslim, [23](#)
Otto, Rudolf, [89](#), [94](#), [96](#)

Pal, B.P., [233](#)
Pascal, [193](#), [195](#), [227](#), [284](#), [290](#)
Payam-e Mashriq, [167](#), [169](#), [184](#), [209](#)
perfect man, concept of, [71](#)
Pierce, [136](#)
piety, concept of, [52](#)
pir, [168–69](#), [173](#)
Plato, [75](#), [127–29](#), [135](#), [166](#), [220](#), [249](#)
Platonism, [127](#), [251](#)
Plotinus, [210](#)
polygamy, [143–44](#)
Possessed, the, [252](#), [286](#)
pretence, doctrine of, [145](#)

qiyas, [45](#), [56–57](#)
Qur'an, [19](#), [28–29](#), [32](#), [37–39](#), [43–45](#), [47](#), [49](#), [51](#), [53](#), [55](#), [57–67](#), [65](#), [79](#), [84](#),
[92](#), [95](#), [97](#), [101–5](#), [109](#), [137](#), [142](#), [144](#), [158](#), [168](#), [194](#), [216](#), [238–40](#),
[275](#), [286](#), [288–89](#), [292](#)
Qusaimi, al-, [33](#), [119](#)

Rashid, al-, [261](#)
Rashidin, Khulafa-e, [269–70](#)
Razi, ar-, [19](#)
reason,

 meaning of in philosophical speculation of

Islamic philosophers, [127–33](#)
revelation debate among philosophers in Islam, [37](#)
Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, [33](#), [37](#), [79](#), [151](#), [167](#), [187–88](#),
[210](#)
religion,
 application to modern life, [98–105](#)
 modernity and, [38–39](#)
religious situation, existential analysis of, [283–98](#)
Rescher, Nicholas, [137](#)
riba, [264](#)
Risalat a-Tawhid, [76](#)
Riza, Rashid, [268](#)
Rousseau, [218](#)
Rumaz-e Bikhudi, [196](#)
Rumi, Jalal ud-Din, [19](#), [38](#), [64](#), [71](#), [113–15](#), [117–18](#), [168–73](#), [175](#), [178–80](#),
[190](#), [194–95](#), [245](#), [252–56](#)
Rushd, Ibn, [19](#), [29](#), [33](#), [81](#), [120](#), [136](#)
Russell, [260](#)

Sa`di, [253–54](#), [256](#)
Sadiq, Imam J'far as-, [29](#)
Sadra, Mulla, [138](#)
Safavids, [36](#)
Said, Edward, [9](#), [13](#)
Salafiya, [54](#), [268](#)
Samkara, [92](#)
samsara, [232](#)
Sanai (sana'i), [113](#)
sanatan dharma, [233](#)
Sartre, Jean-Paul, [25](#), [201](#), [288](#)
Satanic Verses, [23](#)
Schelling, [206](#)
Schimmel, Annemarie, [59](#), [179–80](#)
Schopenhauer, [191–92](#)
Schuon, Frithjof, [65](#), [237](#)
secular state nationalism, [22](#)

secularism,

autonomy principle and, [229–31](#)

concept of time and, [231–32](#)

Indian, [233–36](#)

rationalism principle and, [227–29](#)

western concept of, [225–32](#)

Sein Und Zeit, [203](#)

Seind des Seienden, [201](#)

self and subjectivity, notion of, [14–16](#)

semantics, [173](#)

Shabistari, Mahmud, [170–71](#), [173–74](#)

Shah, Nadir, [220–21](#)

Shakargunj, Sheikh Farid ud-Din, [243](#)

Shakespeare, William, [182](#), [253](#)

Shariah, [32–33](#)

Shi`a Islam, [91](#), [116](#), [271](#)

Shi`ites, [36](#), [141](#), [270](#)

Shirazi, Mulla Sadr ud-Din, [77](#), [138–39](#)

shirk, [91](#), [116](#)

Shiva, [92](#), [183](#), [253](#), [287](#)

Sickness Unto Death, [198](#)

Sikhism, [240–41](#)

Sina, Ibn, [19](#), [29](#); [37](#), [67–69](#); [75](#), [112–13](#); [127–37](#); [249](#);

meaning of reason in systems of, [127–33](#)

Sirhindi, Sheikh Ahmed, [19](#), [90](#), [168–70](#), [175](#), [247](#)

Smith, Margeret, [237](#)

Smith, Wilfred Cantwell [88–89](#)

Socrates, [195](#), [273–74](#)

Socratic, [215](#)

Soderblom, [94](#)

Spengler, [186](#), [216](#)

Spinoza, [192](#), [206](#), [230](#), [257](#), [284](#)

Stoic, [127–28](#)

Stray Reflections, [215](#)

Sufi, [50](#), [52](#), [59](#), [70–71](#), [85](#), [90](#), [94–95](#), [113–16](#), [120](#), [143](#), [157–59](#), [166–79](#),
[190](#), [194](#), [237–58](#), [279](#), [287](#)

concept of man in literature of, [37](#), [248–58](#)
illuminationist view on man's nature
and destiny, [109](#), [115–18](#)
Suhrawardi, Shihab ud-Din as-, [118](#)
sunna, [33](#), [45–46](#), [49–50](#), [52](#), [56](#), [91](#), [141](#), [144–45](#)
Sunni Islam, [69](#), [91](#), [270–71](#), [287](#)
Sunnites, [270](#)
Syed, Ahmad of Jaunpur, [247](#)

tafsir, [28](#)
Tahafat al-Falasifa, [30](#), [33](#)
Tahafat Tahafut al-Falasifa, [31](#)
Tahsil al-Sa`adah, [113](#)
Talib, Gurbachan Singh, [243](#)
tasawwuf, [33](#), [94](#), [255](#), [257](#)
tauhid doctrine of, [94](#)
Taymiya, Ibn, [19](#), [48–49](#), [51–53](#), [77](#), [90–91](#), [119](#)
Thani, Mujaddid Alf, [34](#)
Theravada Buddhism, [92](#)
Thus Spake Zarathustra, [194](#)
Tilak, [277](#)
Tillich, Paul, [64](#), [68](#), [73](#), [85](#), [231](#), [297](#)
time,
 Aristotelians and, [134–39](#)
 and history in Qur'an, [3](#)
Trimingham, T. Spencer, [167](#)

`ulama, [45](#), [51–52](#), [61](#), [144](#), [146](#), [243–44](#), [271](#)
Umar II, [272](#)
Umayyad, [29–30](#), [272](#)
umma, [45](#), [113](#), [141](#), [196](#), [264](#)
utopia, [262](#), [264](#)

Vahiduddin, Syed, [12](#)
Vedantic monism, [241](#)
verfallen concept, [203](#), [205](#)

Vishnu, [253](#)

Von Grunebaum, Gustave E., [58–59](#)

Wahb, Amina bint, [18](#)

wahdat al-shuhud, doctrine of, [34](#)

wahdat al-wujud, doctrine of, [34](#), [91](#)

Wahhab, `Abdu'l-, [52](#)

Waliullah, Shah, [34](#), [52](#)

Waliullahi, [52](#)

Wells, H.G., [29](#)

western secularism, [225–36](#)

What is Philosophy?, [208](#)

Whitehead, A.N., [163](#), [181](#), [189](#)

Windelband, Wilhelm, [191](#)

Wittgenstein, [95](#)

Yusuf, Abdullah, [238](#)

Yusuf, Abu, [261](#)

Zabur-e `Ajam, [167](#), [169](#)

Zaehner, R.C., [136](#)

Zahiris, [49–50](#)

Zahirites, views on man's nature and destiny, [109–12](#)

Zahiriya, [65](#)

Zakariya, [116](#)

zakat, [264](#)

zaman, [135–36](#)

Zaman, Kadir; [5](#); [8](#)

Zoroastrian, [136–37](#), [183–84](#), [194](#)

zuhd, [143](#)

Zurvan, [183](#)

Zurvanite, [136–37](#), [184](#)